THE RAINBOW OF RHYTHMS

FOLK ART TRADITION OF ORISSA

Sitakant Mahapatra





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The *madal* beats
restless it beats
somewhere there, hidden
The *madal's* beat proclaims itself.

– A song of Munda tribe
accompanying a dance - number.

Dedicated

to

The countless generations of

folk dancers, folk singers and artists of Orissa

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

THE UNENDING STREAM

Orissa is a land as rich in various forms of classical art as in its vast repertoire of folk-art. Perhaps that makes it unique in the entire country. On one hand, it has the universally acclaimed classical dance Odissi. It has a thousand years of temple-building tradition culminating in that marvel of sculpture and architecture, the Sun Temple where the artists *built as giants and finished as jewellers*. It has the immense treasure of the *pothis* or palm-leaf manuscripts, which combine script, illustrations and paintings in an enviable manner.

On the other hand, it has the rhythmic fury and sweet elegance of various forms and varieties of folk performing arts; the songs, folk theatres and paintings; as also tribal songs and dances.

Some classical forms have elements of folk in them, perhaps originating from and inspired by the latter. The folkish *gotipua* dance's acknowledged inspiration for Odissi is well known. There is noticeable parallel between the *tribhanga* and *chauka* of chhau and the temple-dance origin of Odissi. The Santali *Dasain* dance resembles chhau. What applies to performing arts is also true of visual art-forms. The *pothi* illustrations, the temple murals, the folk forms in modern paintings, the *jhotis* on mud-hut walls - all these connect each other. *Prahlad Nataka* anticipates highly evolved stage management and intimately resembles classical theatre.

The folk-art forms owe their origin to the lifestyle of the people, the rural folk as well as the tribals. The rhythms of folk life pulsate in them. Simple religious faith is enacted. The entire

business of living is thus punctuated by performances that belong to the community. It originates from and flourishes in the rich web of community-living as forms of *communitas*.

The folk art of Orissa, like all folk art, originated in the life-style of the people, are nourished by the generations and carried forward over time.

Pala, which is poetry as performance, links the puranic and classical themes to folkish parody and irreverent satire, so much a part of rural life. As a religious ritual it is performed in the houses by a priest, seeking blessings of Satyanarayana. It is also performed before large cheering audiences. The recurrent seasons of the year and the patterns of agricultural operations which some of them celebrate are worthy of notice. Where can one find a parallel to Bargarh's Dhanujatra when the entire township becomes a stage, the drab local river becomes Yamuna and Krishna-Balaram annihilate their maternal-uncle Kamsa? The whole town participates day after day with an emotional fervour that has to be watched to be believed. Many forms like *Danda Nacha* have their religious significance.

This small anthology of essays seeks to highlight the essentials of Orissa's rich folk-art tradition. Not all of them could be included nor described more fully for constraints of space. If it generates in the readers an appetite to know more, I will consider my efforts amply rewarded.

Sitakant Mahapatra



Hiranyakashipu in Prahlad Natak



Prahlad in Prahlad Natak

Prahlada Nataka

A Window on a Syncretic Performative Tradition

In Orissa, largely due to historical reasons, there is a remarkable continuity between classical, folk and tribal art-forms. Orissa was one of the last regions to come under the British rule. This led to the late introduction of English education and other modernising influences and subsequently, in a large measure, to Orissa's economic and industrial backwardness when independence came in 1947. But this also had the beneficial effect of allowing the various rich forms of folk-art and folk-culture to survive in their original, and relatively pure, forms. Orissa is also an almost open ethnographic museum with a large variety of tribal communities at various stages of acculturation and primitiveness. These communities have been endowed with rich autonomous cultures which have acted and reacted on the classical and folk art-forms of the neighbouring non-tribal world. The result is a rare evidence of classical-folk-tribal continuum which is hardly seen in such profusion and intensity elsewhere in the country. This is true of Odissi as a classical dance, of the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, of the Patta painting originating from the Jagannath temple, the Sahi Jatra of Puri and also of a number of other plastic, performing and literary traditions. *Prahlada Nataka*, a play composed around 1860 in Oriya and attributed to Raja Ramakrishna Deva Chhotray of Jalantara, amply reveals this rich continuum in its literary and performative aspects.

Jalantara is now a part of Andhra Pradesh. The former palace of the king of Jalantara lies in ruins but there are about thirty-five distinct amateur, village-theatre companies in the Ganjam

district of Orissa adjoining Andhra Pradesh who perform the play. How this performing tradition traversed from the court to the villages and the present form of the play took shape should be a matter for elaborate and detailed study. In fact, the performance deserves to be placed in the larger context of the literary, ritual-religious and performative traditions of Eastern India and more particularly, Orissa.

The Play: its Authorship & Composition

The story narrates the emergence of Narasimha, the man-lion avatar of Vishnu, from a stone pillar of the royal court to mangle and kill Hiranyakashipu, the demon-king. Tortured by his father Hiranyakashipu, who demands that he abandon uttering even the name of Hari or God, Prahlada does not relent and insists, instead, that Hari is present in all objects in the Universe, animate or inanimate. At this, the demon-king points to the stone pillar of the court and asks Prahlada whether Vishnu or Hari is present in it. When Prahlada's reply is in a firm affirmative, he kicks the pillar in anger at which point Narasimha emerges from inside it, tears Hiranyakashipu apart and blesses Prahlada. Narasimha is one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

The play has been edited by the Orissa Cultural Affairs Department in 1973 (Oriya Manuscript No. 46 in the Orissa Museum). The manuscript travelled from the Madras Oriental Manuscript Library (No. 1984) to the Provincial Museum located in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack on 3rd August 1938 and later to the State Museum at Bhubaneswar. The copy of the manuscript appears to have been prepared in 1921-22.



While the play is attributed to Ramakrishna Deva Chhotray of Jalantara, it is possible that Gourhari

Parichha, the well-known poet who was a contemporary of the king and a friend of the Jalantara court, composed part or may be even a bulk of the play. It is said that Gourhari had dedicated this play to the king of Jalantara and that during his lifetime the play had not been well publicised or staged. After Gourhari's death, the king is supposed to have claimed credit for its authorship and sent copies in his own name to the different royal courts of Ganjam. It is a historical fact that the kings in Ganjam district were not only lovers of art, literature, music and dance but also personally practised these arts. More particularly, they actively encouraged the performing arts. The dedication of literary works to kings or zamindars, in return for patronage received, was a common enough practice in 19th century feudal Orissa.

A comparison of *Prahlada Nataka* with other poetic works of Gourhari Parichha for internal evidences of similarity of idiom, emotive flavour, style and language etc. is yet to be made but even a broad analysis shows that *Prahlada Nataka* could be a syncretic work of more than one author including Gourhari, King Ramakrishna and other minor authors. The play incorporates diverse styles and idioms and also reveals a deep knowledge and understanding of Sanskrit poetics and dramaturgy, Puranic lore, astrology, politics, economics, medicine, traditional religion and philosophy and above all of classical music. Gourhari's other compositions like *Vastrapaharana (The Stealing of the Garments)*. Gita Govinda and the numerous *chaupadi*-s (included in *Gourhari Granthabali* or *The Collected Works of Gourhari* edited by Aparna Panda and published in 1926 reveal a vein of lyricism and romanticism. So it is difficult to regard him as the author of many of the terse, academic and dry pages of the play.





Prahlad Natak

The *Ganjam District Manual* refers to the founding of the small kingdom of Jalantara in South Orissa by the Sun-king Gajapati Purushottama Deva (1466—1497) on his victorious return from Kanchi. He is supposed to have defeated the Chief of Savaras (a primitive tribe who inhabit the Ganjam hill tracts even to this day), founded the kingdom of Jalantara and installed his son Govind Chhotray Deva on the throne as the first ruler. Historical evidence prove this and also place Ramakrishna Deva Chhotray's reign between 1857 to 1905. At the end of his rule, the Estate was sold to the Raja of Vizinagram by the British Government for arrears of *peishkush* (royal dues).

Prahlada Nataka is a very unusual play. Unusual in its combination of Oriya and Sanskrit *shloka*-s, of colloquial, light and occasionally boisterous dramatic statements with songs based on classical *raga*-s and well-defined *tala*-s, of using both the Sutradhara in the pattern of Sanskrit plays and a Gahaka as in traditional folk-opera. It also incorporates certain contemporaneous Oriya poetic conventions, and traditions of both *Danda nata* of Ganjam and *Desia nata* of Koraput districts. Like the former, it uses techniques of trance, visitation, ritual worship of images, exorcism and masks, reminding one of the Tantric *Shakti* cult and the performances associated with it. On the other hand, like *Desia nata*, it also uses lyrical folk tunes and stories. Some scholars also point to the influence of *Yakshagana* literature.



The play contains as many as fortytwo Sanskrit *shloka*-s and eleven Oriya *shloka*-s or invocations. There are 126 songs which use thirty-five *raga*-s[1] and six *tala*-s.[2] There are twenty male and five female characters in the play. The *Sutradhara* appears on several occasions

in the play. This and the traditional *Nandipath* and the *Vaitalik* musical interlude are elements of the Sanskrit dramatic tradition. There is no systematic emphasis on presentation of the different *rasa*-s as in Sanskrit plays. The pattern of dialogues, the movement of the main theme, the mechanism of presentation, the sustaining spirit of the main ideas, the categorisation of Acts and Scenes, the types of *nayaka*-s and *nayika*-s and the general sense of conventional propriety and decorum which are the hallmarks of the traditional Sanskrit play cannot be discerned in *Prahlada Nataka.*

The role of the *Gahaka* in the play is indeed very interesting. He announces dramatic incidents, makes possible the appropriate pace of the play's development and is, in fact, the prime director of this movement. He determines the entry of characters to the stage, the events and the modulation of emotive sequences and serves as the vital lifeline between the characters and the audience.

The presentation and the management of the stage have certain special characteristics. Speaking of dramatic performances in rural India, J.C. Mathur commented:

"Places of performance are, therefore, so arranged as to reveal the beauty and colour of the costume and the intricacies of the dances to everybody and to enable the audience to share intimately the pleasures of poetry, the rhythm and melody of the songs .... While in the Ramalila large audiences sit on both sides of the performing arena and stage, the spectators of the *Prahlada Nataka* of Ganjam district of Orissa occupy the space between the two parties of performers (*Drama in Rural India*, page 13)." This seems to be based upon wrong premises.



From this description, it would appear that he is referring to the performance of *Vadi pala* or *Jatra* where the rival performers face each other.

The Stage and Presentation

In *Prahlada Nataka*, the major requirement is a medium-sized, flat wooden stage, with steps or stairs forming an essential part and leading on to it. The flat portion just above the highest stair is used as the throne for the demon-king Hiranyakashipu. The audience can, therefore, sit mostly in front of this wooden platform and on the three sides. The ground immediately in front of the last step is the second element of the stage and is used for a number of scenes in the play. The audience naturally has to sit a little distance away in keeping with the requirements of proper viewing since some of the events take place at a considerable height and at different levels on the wooden staircase. The stage and presentation arrangements normally have the following features:

1. In the final act, a pillar is erected opposite the main stage (open area in front of the wooden stairs) and it is from this pillar that Narasimha, the man-lion *avatar* of Vishnu emerges.
2. Narasimha is brought from the green room to the pillar in such a manner that the audience cannot see him. He is kept hidden behind the pillar until the king rushes down the stairs in rage and kicks the pillar.
3. As the Narasimha mask is very huge, the actor has to wear a fairly massive turban to which the mask can be securely fitted.
4. The mask of Narasimha is not an ordinary decorative mask. It is treated as sacred and to



ensure that it commands proper respect from the wearer and audience, it is ritually worshipped both at the beginning of the performance in the green-room and throughout the year in a nearby temple.

5. Formerly, the scene where Narasimha tears away the demon-king until his entrails emerge was mimetically presented on the stage. Legend has it that one such presentation led to the real killing of Hiranyakashipu by Narasimha who was 'possessed' beyond control. Since then a different practice is followed. In the final act, Hiranyakashipu now flees to the green-room and Narasimha chases him with a wild roar to the deafening applause of the audience. In some performances, Narasimha is also restrained by several persons who pull at a rope tied to his waist.
6. The orchestra, the *Gahaka*, the *Sutradhara* and their helpers take their position on one side of the stage and the performers enter from the opposite side through a pathway carved out among the audience.
7. Besides the *Gahaka* and the *Sutradhara*, there are two more lead singers and three to four subsidiary singers participating in the enactment.
8. Ritual purity is imposed on the performers, extending to certain restrictions on food and dress. In one village, the author was told that convention demands abstaining from sex (at least a day prior to the performance), from eating meat and from dressing gaudily outside the area of the stage.



The acting area thus comprises three distinct parts: a wooden stage with a large flight of stairs serving as

the throne and the court of the king with ministers, commanders and other courtiers sitting in descending order of importance on the stairs; the open flat ground just in front; and a pillar facing the main stage. This gives the entire presentation a panoramic and spectacular appearance and helps in creating a sense of dramatic realism.

Sahitya Darpana, the celebrated text on aesthetics, lays down the parameters of the different *rasa*-s. In fact, the soul of Sanskrit drama was *rasa*— *Rasashrayam Natyam* (the play rests on the *rasa*-s). In *Prahlada Nataka*, four *rasa*-s predominate: *Hasya, Karuna, Bhaya* and *Raudra*.

Raudra rasa characterises the speeches of Hiranyakashipu when he prides himself on his own powers as the conqueror of the three worlds, when he admonishes his son Prahlada to give up uttering the name of Hari, when he orders his ministers and others to penalise Prahlada and when Narasimha emerges from the stone pillar. The element of fright is evident on the face of Hiranyakashipu when Narasimha finally emerges from the pillar and advances menacingly towards him. The face, which was bursting with bravado and grandeur minutes ago, is now deadly pale, and stricken with panic. *Karuna rasa* is embodied in the utterances of the queen Lilavati, wife of the demon-king. There are strong elements of humour and hilarity in the dialogue between the gatekeeper at Hiranyakashipu's palace and the sage Narada, between the *Dasi* and the *Dhaima*, in the dress and dialogue of *kela-keluni*, Shukracharya and Chandamarka. Besides these four dominant *rasa-s*, there are also traces of *Shringara rasa* (in the dialogue between the king and the queen) and *Vatsalya* (in the queen's concern for her son Prahlada) at different points in the



play. Viswanath Kaviraj's *Sahitya Darpana* defines not only the various *rasa*-s on which Sanskrit drama depended but also the types of *nayaka*-s and *nayika*-s. The *nayaka* is supposed to possess eight *sattvik* qualities:

शोभाविलासो माधुर्यं गाम्भीर्यं धैर्यतेजसी ।
ललितौदार्यमित्यष्टौ सत्त्वजाः पौरुष गुणाः ॥

In the play, Prahlada, the hero, symbolises the quality of *dhirodatta* while Hiranyakashipu, the anti-hero, represents the *dhirodhatta*. Similarly, Lilavati can be characterised as a *sviya nayika*.

Nowhere in the play is there any definitive mention of acts or scenes. There is only a mention of "the end of the first day and night" after the birth of Prahlada. The play used to be performed either for three nights or seven nights on the pattern of Ramalila. Historical evidence indicates that initially the normal period during which the playwas performed was seven nights. Gradually it was considered too long, both by the performers and the audience and, therefore, reduced to a three-night performance for modern audiences. There is also a one-night performance which skips over what is considered inessential, retaining only the basic core of the theme. The general pattern of dividing the play into three or seven parts is as below:



Three nights' break-up: (a) From the invocation to Ganesha to the birth of Prahlada; (b) From Prahlada's visit to the house of his Guru to the sacrificial offering to Chandi; (c) From the threats administered to Prahlada by the demons on the king's orders to Hiranyakashipu's death at the hands of Narasimha.

Seven nights' break-up: (1) The penance of

Hiranyakashipu; (2) The birth of Prahlada; (3) His education and upbringing; (4) The punishment meted out to Prahlada through Gajakarnavira and the wild elephant; (5) The chastising of Prahlada through his being thrown from the top of a mountain, sacrificially offered to Bhudevi and cast away in a cave; (6) Prahlada's ordeal by fire, his abandonment to snakes and incarceration in prison; (7) The killing of Hiranyakashipu.

The theme of Prahlada has been very widely used in Indian Puranic literature and performing arts throughout the centuries. In the words of J.C. Mathur, "like a spring with a common source, these stories well up in Bhagavat Mela of Madras State, Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh, the Lilas of Uttar Pradesh, the Ankiya Nata of Assam and the Yatra of Orissa and Bengal. The story of Hiranyakashipu, the demon-king and Narasimha, the lion-incarnation of Vishnu is a theme with an all-India appeal" (*Drama in Rural India*, p. 77).

In Puranic literature, there are four major references to this theme of Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada and Narasimha : (1) The Fifth Chapter of the Bhumi cantos of the *Padma Purana*; (2) The sixteenth to twentieth chapters of the 1st canto of *Vishnu Purana*; (3) The Ninth Chapter of the 4th canto of *Devi Bhagavata* and (4) The first ten Chapters of the 7th canto of *Srimad Bhagavata*.

The description of events and situations in these works as also in the Sanskrit *Narasimha Purana* agrees in broad details. The essence of the theme is, in fact, identical. After learning of the death of his brother Hiranyaksha at the hands of Lord Vishnu in his Varaha incarnation, Hiranyakashipu pleases Brahma through deep penance. Brahma blesses him and grants him a boon: Neither man, god or animal can kill him; he cannot be destroyed on



earth, in the sky or on the oceans or by any weapon; he cannot be annihilated during day or night. In fact, what actually happens is that Hiranyakashipu is killed by a hybrid of man and beast, Narasimha. He is torn apart on Narasimha's lap with the man-lion using his hands and fingers to destroy him during the hour of gathering dusk. Narasimha emerges from the pillar in the final act, kills Hiranyakashipu and his anger is not quenched even by the invocations of Indra and other gods. Only Prahlada's prayers finally succeed in calming him down and he becomes his former self.

While the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have Rama and Krishna as *avatar*-s and the Bhagavadgita has only Krishna, later *Purana*-s (such as the *Agni Purana* and the *Varaha Purana*) and Jayadev's *Gita Govinda* refer to the ten incarnations of Vishnu including Narasimha. In fact, the *Narasimha Purana* refers to eleven incarnations, one of them being Krishna.

Orissa has a tradition of using the Prahlada theme in *Yatra*, *Leela* and plays. Of the literary works produced on the theme, mention may be made of the following:

1. *Prahlada Nataka* of Kishore Chandra Harichandan Jagadev, the king of Surangi in Ganjam district
2. *Sangita Prahlada Nataka* of Padmanav Narayan Dev, the king of Paralakhemundi
3. *Prahlada Nataka* of Ramachandra Sur Deo, the king of Tarala



4. *Prahlada Charita* of the popular dramatist, Vaishnav Pani; and
5. *Prahlada Nataka* now under discussion

All of them use the theme to illustrate the supreme value of unflinching devotion to Vishnu and the importance of the incarnation of Vishnu as Narasimha

or man-lion. The thematic treatment as also the story line is more or less the same. While Vaishnav Pani uses more of colloquial Oriya, the other four authors, all of whom were kings in southern Orissa in the nineteenth century, use a mixture of the Sanskritised and colloquial idiom. It is difficult to explain why the theme had a special appeal to the royal authors. All of them incidentally were worshippers of Vishnu. Of these five plays, *Prahlada Nataka*, now under discussion, is indisputably the most impressive in terms of literary and theatrical achievement.

The play begins with an invocation to the guru, a customary practice in all the performing arts in India. This is followed by invocations to Lord Ganesha, also called Gananatha, and to Bhagwati Sharada or Saraswati.

Ganesha is invoked both in a Sanskrit *shloka* and an Oriya song. While the Sanskrit shloka is well-known, the Oriya song is quite interesting in its own way and sung in *raga* Bhairavi set to Athatala:

> "We bow at the feet of Lord Gananatha. Oh son of Parvati, who rides a mouse, has four hands and an elephant's head, grant us your blessings. He, who carries an elephant prod and is obese. Lord Gananatha, whose ears flap like fans, and who is charming. Carrying six types of offerings to you with incense, lighted candles, betelnut, and fragrant flowers, Shri Nrupakeshara Ramakrishna Vira hastens to kneel before Lord Shankar's son."

The story is then introduced by the *Gahaka*.

Gahaka: Invoked in so many ways, Lord Gananatha appeared and spoke thus.



Ganesha: Oh, Leader of the *Nataka*, why do you invoke my name?

Gahaka: Oh, Remover of Obstacles, I pray to you, let our play proceed without hindrances.

Ganesha: So be it.

Later, after invocations have been sung to Saraswati and Narasimha, the *Gahaka* further says: "I now invoke the great poets to bless the efforts of humble men who would narrate the story of the appearance of the fourth incarnation of Vishnu. Listen to how the tale begins. Oh, learned pundits, listen with pleasure to the style of this *nataka*. Do not find fault if it fails to have the right elegance of poetry for I am unlettered by nature. Even in my dreams I have kept poor company. Yet I make bold to appear before you bearing in mind the feats of Hari."

Thereafter, the *Sutradhara* reels out a long list of *swara*-s, *raga*-s. *nayaka* types etc. The *Gahaka* intervenes once again to begin the real play, indicating its context:

"Then the great king Parikshita looked at Sukadeva and asked him how it was that Sesanka Vihari was born out of a pillar in the form of Narasimha, and what it was that Prahlada said to his father, what were the punishments inflicted on him and how Kamala's Lord, enraged, killed Hiranyakashipu. Relate the full story and, in so doing, take away the burden of sin. Hearing this, Sukadeva began the tale."



This is how the *Gahaka*, the lead singer, begins the play. In effect, he is the most important link in the chain of dramatic events.

In *Prahlada Nataka*, the divine presence of Narasimha is brought onto the stage by the technique of trance or spirit possession, by magic and ritual which

plays such an important role in most primitive cultures. An individual, a family or even the entire community may face a calamity or a tragedy in the form of an epidemic or death at the hands of man-eating tigers or the depredation of wild animals, or devastation by floods or earthquakes. Unable to discern the proximate or remote cause of such tragedies through reasoning and logic, the primitive mind attributes these afflictions to the wrath of malevolent gods of spirits, who are sought to be placated by suitable offerings. Often, such propitiation may not be for the negative purpose of warding off disasters but for invoking their blessings for peace and prosperity.

This propitiation assumes many forms – and a vast complex of ritual-religious ceremonies may be associated with it as a sort of attempt to appease and thereby gain control over unspecified and unknown forces of nature. The forms of propitiation are often a combination of (a) ritual chantings, invocations or incantations, (b) certain purificatory rites involving the person or persons offering worship and the physical space where it is being sanctified, (c) physical objects such as food or drink, flowers, incense etc. and (d) accompanying plastic or performing arts such as specially designed paintings, icons or murals and song and dance numbers. All such magical activities invoking the spirits or "powers" involve three major aspects. Bronislaw Malinowski characterises them as—things said, things done, and a person officiating. Hence, the spell, the rite and the condition of the performer are the basic ingredients of the ritual performance. The *bejuni* (the woman who is possessed) in Kondh tribal society, the *ojha* in Santal or the *kudan* (the priest) in Saora society, is literally possessed by the spirit he or she invokes and



ultimately represents, and then utters certain clue statements leading to the understanding of the specific causes of disease or death. In *Prahlada Nataka*, the same technique is followed in a performative context. The ritual initiation is parallel to primitive trance-possession. In this case, the actor-priest who is to wear the Narasimha mask is required to perform a fairly elaborate *puja* propitiating and invoking the spirit of the mask. The ritual worship includes the use of sacred water, flowers, coconut, sandalwood paste, incense, lighted lamp, and prescribed *mudra*-s of the hand. The worship is conducted off-stage, and prior to the performance while the orchestra plays on. All the performers gather around the mask and sing prescribed invocations to Vishnu. This ritual is, in fact, only a continuation of the worship of the mask in a nearby temple throughout the year. At the time of the performance, the worship shifts from the temple to the dressing room. John Emigh, Professor of Theatre Arts at Brown University, U.S.A., has worked on a translation of *Prahlada Nataka*. He quotes some villagers in the Ganjam district: "The performer who wore the mask received a dream in which the spirit of the mask stated that he would no longer enter into the performance because he was not being properlyworshipped. The mask then became so heavy that no one could lift it".

In contrast, the person playing the role of Ganesha wears only a papier-mache elephant mask and jumps off a floorboard to do a vigorous dance before blessing the performance in response to the invocation to him. Saraswati also blesses the performance. Female roles in *Prahlada Nataka* are performed by males even to this day. One must note, however, that, unlike Narasimha, neither Ganesha nor Saraswati are supposed



to possess the respective performers. The Ganesha mask is only a part of the costume; it is never worshipped in a temple nor at the site before the performance begins. The pattern of representation is mime and not direct *becoming*.

The orchestra is very important in the play. There are a large number of *raga*-based songs. Appropriate instrumental accompaniment is, therefore, crucial. Normally, the orchestra consists of two *mridangam*-s, five or six sets of cymbals, a harmonium, two or three long trumpets, a small *mahuri* and a conch shell. The conch shell is generally used to herald Narasimha's entrance onto the stage in the final act of the drama. The dramatic actions are paralleled by appropriate musical scores and flourishes. The *Prahlada Nataka*, thus, has elements of the classical Sanskrit play, folk, opera or *yatra*, *Desia nata* and *Danda nata*, even while its theme is admittedly classical. The presentation, however, borrows liberally from the folk and tribal motifs of adjoining areas. Only recently, scholars have begun recognising this linkage of classical, folk and tribal patterns, not only in this particular play and its performance, but in Indian performative art-tradition in general. Secondly, this tradition also has an intimate relationship with the religious and ritual traditions of society. John Emigh, this author understands, took up a detailed research project on this "inter-play" and this author entirely agrees with his view that "the assimilation and syncretic use of several performance traditions by the poets, musicians, and royal patrons of Jalantara, and the later diffusion of the work into the villages of Ganjam through the court of Chikiti present a fascinating example of the dynamic interplay between classical, folk and tribal traditions."



Notes:

1. Arup, Aravi, Asabari, Ahari. Kalyan, Kalyani, Kamodi, Kedargouda, Khamaj, Chantaraba, Jhinjoti, Todi Punnaga, Desh, Desi Khamaj, Desiya Todi, Nabaraju, Nabaraj Nata. Nadaramakriya, Panta, Barali, Punnaga Marua. Puri Kalyani, Bihag. Bhairavi, Marua, Mukhari. Yamuna Kalyani, Regupta. Shankaravarana. Shree, Shrota, Saberi Sindhukhamai, Sahana, Hindustani Todi.
2. At Tal, Atha Tal, Adi Tal, Ek Tal, Jhula, Rupak.

Pala: Poetry as Performance

The Origin and Development of *Pala* in Orissa

Pala occupies a very special place in the complex mosaic of Orissa's performing arts. It shares certain elements with the other forms of folk performing arts such as *Jatra*, *Suanga* and *Leela*. Like them *Pala* uses literary themes, stories and anecdotes to



entertain spectators. Like these forms, it, too, is a blend of story-telling through *kavya,* music and dramatic performance designed to grip the imagination of the audience. But, in addition, *Pala* is intimately linked, on the one hand, to a form of religious worship and ritual practised in medieval Orissa and, on the other, to the elitist culture of the pundits and scholars well-versed in the

Sanskritic tradition of the *Purana*-s and other literary works.

The worship of *Pancha devata* (the five deities) can be traced to a very old tradition in Orissa. The deities are Ganesha, Vishnu, Durga. Shiva and Bhaskara (the Sun-god). During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at the time of the Bhaumakara, Somavamsi and Ganga dynastic rule in Orissa, the relative importance of Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava cults and their forms of worship kept on fluctuating on the basis of royal patronage. The Somavamsis were patrons of Shiva worship and the Bhaumakaras of Shakti worship. While they patronised Vaishnavite worship, the Gangas were not averse to Shaiva or Shakta cults. Later, during the period of the Gangas, to these three was added the worship of Bhaskara and Ganesha. In fact, particular *kshetra*-s or places of worship came to be associated with each of these presiding deities. Bhubaneswar came to be associated with Shiva worship, Jajpur or Birajakshetra with Shakti worship, Puri with Vishnu worship, Konarak with Sun-worship and Maha-Binayaka with Ganesha worship. Such was the spirit of religious eclecticism current in the air and further encouraged by the royal dynasty that whenever any one of the five deities was worshipped, the other four were assigned places of honour and were, in fact, ritually invoked to come to the sanctified "ground of worship".

Pala as a performing art emerged from this worship of the five deities. In the early days of *Pala*, there used to be five singers (*Gayaka*-s) who would recite songs, *shloka*-s and *stuti*-s in praise of the five deities. These were taken from ancient or classical Sanskrit texts, *Purana*-s and some contemporaneous writings. The leader among the five gradually came



to be known as *Gayaka*, while the other four were designated as *Palia*-s (literally meaning those who join in the refrain). They used to be dressed in the typical Odissi style of the time, which included an Odissi type of *pugree* on the head, a *dhoti* worn in the style of the Oriya *Paika*-s and a long glittering and often colourful gown going down well below the knees. A costly *chadar* covered the neck and the shoulders and earrings, bracelets and armlets were also worn. The costume was thus almost royal in style. They would sing to the accompaniment of *ramtali* (two pieces of symmetrical and decorative wood which strike against each other and produce a rhythmic beat), *mridanga* and cymbals and they wore *nupur*-s round the ankles.

It is important to note that, in this traditional pattern, a *Pala* presentation always began with an invocation to and worship of the five deities. On a low wooden table called *asthana* (seat), covered with a coloured piece of cloth, were placed (on betel leaves) five pairs of ripe bananas with the skin peeled off, each pair symbolising one deity. Invocations to each of the deities were recited by the *Gayaka*. The area where the *asthana* was placed was always sanctified by *Panchamruta*. The recitation was elaborate and ritualistic and the religious litany accompanying it was as important as the singing. The invocations were mostly from Sanskrit texts including the Vedas and the Upanishads and the singer-priest was expected to have an intimate knowledge of the *shastra*-s.

This ritual worship was followed by the *Pala* proper, namely, the recitation of a story or a theme. Sometimes, when it was not meant as entertainment for an audience, the ritual worship alone could be conducted and the theme-story



would be simply recited in the house of the patron by the local priest without the help of any *Palia* or *Palia*-s. In other words, the priest would be the lone *Gayaka* and he would merely recite the *Pala* theme. Such celebrations are conducted for various purposes in Orissa and Bengal even today. In Orissa, sometimes sixteen *Pala*-s are offered to the deities to appease the gods, to ward off some personal tragedy or in fulfillment of a vow. If a sick child lies dying, his mother or grandmother may pledge to have sixteen *Pala*-s or twelve *Pala*-s, spread over as many years, as an offering to ensure that the child is cured by the grace of God. If the wish is fulfilled *Pala*-s are performed annually for the prescribed number of years on an appointed auspicious day.

There is considerable evidence to show that till about the seventeenth century *Pala* recitation was confined to royal courts as a form of aesthetic literary enjoyment mixed with religious worship or to individual households for the exclusive purpose of religious worship. In the former case, the *Pala Gayaka* or singer exhibited his knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Sanskrit classics and the Oriya *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in the presentation of the theme or the story. Generally the story element in a *Pala* recitation was thin and the padding was provided by diversions into ancillary themes, related episodes or literary cross-references. This is the pattern in *Pala* recitation that is followed to this day.



The priest who recited the *Pala* as a form of religious worship in the household of his *jajamana* (patron) was very rarely a scholar. This is why in later centuries, more often than not, he used to recite on the basis of a printed text rather than from memory. His capacity for improvisation and

forays into literary cross-references was severely limited. For example, if the recitation included a description of a morning, or a season, or the face of a *nayika*, he never displayed his erudition by introducing material about how such a beautiful face or season had been delineated by Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Magha or even well-known Oriya poets, including the authors of the Oriya *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He generally read out the text from a palm-leaf manuscript. This, too, was called *Pala* to which only relations and friends in the village were invited.

Over the centuries the repertoire of an erudite *Pala Gayaka* kept on expanding. First it was the Vedas and the Upanishads, the religious texts and the *purana*-s; later, the sanskrit classics were added; still later the works of Upendra Bhanja, the master of Oriya *Riti-Kavya;* of Radhanath Ray, the first great poet of the modern age; the works of that great craftsman of language, Gangadhar Meher, or of Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha and other poets both from the medieval and modern poetic tradition. Among the medieval authors particular mention may be made of Balaram Das's *Laxmipurana* and Jasobanta Das's *Govinda Chandra* Upendra Bhanja's *Vaidehisha Bilasha* and *Subhadra Parinaya* and Gangadhar Meher's *Tapaswini, Pranaya Ballari, Indumati* and *Kichaka Badha* were also extremely popular.

Around the seventeenth century the poet Kabi Karna composed a number of *Pala*-s specifically meant for recitation in a religious context. Kabi Karna's life and times have not been discussed fully but it is generally agreed that he lived in the later part of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth century. This was a time when politics and society in Orissa and Bengal were undergoing swift



changes. The Muslim invasion of Bengal and Orissa prompted some popular authors to compose what they thought was a literature for bringing together the Muslim and Hindu cultures and forms of worship. It was, for example, maintained by some that Satyanarayana, Narayana or Vishnu, the presiding deity of *Pala* as a form of worship, was indistinguishable from Satyapira who was an incarnation, a devout Muslim saint or Fakir. This belief was particularly strong in Bengal where Satyanarayana Panchali came to be identified with *Pala* and also incorporated in it themes relating to the apotheosis of Satyapira. *Panchamruta* was expanded to include *sirini*, a preparation made out of ripe banana mixed with flour, milk, molasses etc. In 1568 A.D., Orissa came under the Muslim rule of the Goud Sultans. Only certain areas of Puri and the Ganjam districts continued to be independent and the King of Orissa, Gajapati Ramachandra Deva, was designated as *Thakur Raja* or the King of the God. Mansingh, the able general of Akbar, attacked Orissa and the Moghul armies established their camps in various parts of what is modern Orissa. It was during these troubled times that Kabi Karna, (who seems to have known both the Oriya and Bengali languages equally well) composed his sixteen *Pala*-s. Each of these *Pala*-s describes the *mahima* (power or glory) of Satyapira through a story. For example, in one of these *Pala*-s, Satyapira himself appears in disguise as an old man before a rich merchant and advises him to offer worship to Satyapira. The merchant laughs at the old man and his apotheosis of Satyapira. He incurs the wrath of Satyapira and is reduced to beggary. Then he realises his guilt and atones for his sin by arranging the performance of Satyapira *Pala*. He is, thereafter, freed from the



consequences of the curse. This is identical with the theme of the *mahima* of Satyanarayana, the incarnation of Vishnu. Even the *Skanda Purana* has four cantos devoted to the worship of Satyanarayana. The stories are supposed to have been narrated by the sage Narada to Shuka and by the latter to sage Shaunaka in the forest of Naimishya. In one of the stories Satyanarayana speaks to an old Brahmin in Kashipur about the virtue of worshipping him. The poor Brahmin follows his advice and his poverty vanishes, winning him unasked-for riches. The other chapters similarly delineate themes of good fortune, including the birth of a son to an issueless king worried about the continuity of his dynastic line.

Kabi Karna composed sixteen *Pala*-s. The Orissa State Museum has, however, a total number of twenty-nine *Pala*-s in palm-leaf manuscript. Some of these *Pala*-s are assigned to more than one poet. For example, Satyanarayana *Janma Pala* has three different versions and these are by Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha and Shankara Acharya respectively. Kabi Karna's language is a peculiar mixture of Oriya and Bengali as the following extracts (first in transliteration in Roman script and then an English rendering) would indicate.

Ami Sehi devata aekha nirakara
Swargamartya rasatalebarani amara.

Jagannath rupe ami Odisate ara
Hindu Musalman sabu kari ekakara.

Rama Rahimana jana Koran Purane
Dekhiba kemana rupa mane ki na mane.

Dariate Darubrahma rupeta bhiasena
Padmaphula rupa haiya Satyanarayana.



Bauddha rupate nilachale bijekari
Patita pabana rupe patita uddhari.

Sachi garbhe janamila nadia nagara
Sehi Mahabahu ebe kalite Fakira

I am that God, ummanifest and without shape
My deeds extend to all the three worlds.
For my incarnation as Jagannath in Orissa
I welded the Hindus and Muslim into one group.
Know me as Rama and Rahiman
Described in the Koran and the Purana.
And see my vision and realise me
Whether you recognise it or not.
In the ocean I floated
As the log of wood in which the Brahman inhered
And I too floated as the lotus, the Satyanarayan.
As the incarnation of Buddha
I appeared at the Blue Mountain
And became the saviour of all the fallen.
In the city of Nadia, I took birth in Sachi's womb
And I am the same Lord
Now only a Fakir in this Kaliyuga.

Some of the contemporaries of Kabi Karna composed in the Oriya language. Among them particular mention should be made of Dwija Bishwanatha, Bhrugurama and Shankara Acharya.



Below is a complete list of the twenty-nine *Pala-s* along with the names of the poets to whom each of these is ascribed. When one *Pala* has several identical or near identical versions, all the relevant authors have been mentioned against it.

	Name of Pala	*Author / Authors*
1.	*Satyanarayana*	Kabi Karna., Dwija Bishwanatha Shankara Acharya
2.	*Abhinna Madan*	Kabi Kama
3.	*Ugratara*	Kabi Kama. Dwija Kashinatha, Shankara Acharya
4.	*Kathuria*	Kabi Kama, Huduram Das
5.	*Kishorechandra*	Kabi Karna, Kishorechandra Patadeb
6.	*Gudiasankar*	Kabi Kama, Dwija Bishwanatha Jayakrushna
7.	*Dashabatara*	Kabi Karna
8.	*Durjan Rajan*	Kabi Karna
9.	*Padmalochana*	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha
10.	*Bhramarbara*	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha
11.	*Manohar Phasiar*	Kabi Karna, Dwija Kashinatha
12.	*Mardagaji Janma*	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha
13.	*Mardagaji Bibha*	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha
14.	*Rangalata*	Kabi Karna
15.	*Laxmankumar*	Kabi Karna
16	*Ratnakara*	Bhrugurama
17.	*Sadananda Saudagar*	Kabi Karna, Bhrugurama
18.	*Bidyadhara*	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Shankara Acharya, Bipra Jagannatha
19.	*Nilasundara*	Kabi Karna
20.	*Madansundara*	Kabi Karna., Dwija Bishwambhara
21.	*Hari Arjuna*	Kabi Karna
22.	*Swetabasanta*	Kabi Karna., Dwija Bishwanath
23.	*Herachanda*	Kabi Karna., Dwija Bishwanath
24.	*Dayananda*	Kabi Karna., Dwija Raghurama
25.	*Dwarika*	Sitalacharana
26.	*Hemaghata*	Nityananda
27.	*Satyanarayana*	Kabi Kama, Shankara Acharya, Kinkar Das, Rameshwara
28.	*Vandana*	Kabi Karna
29.	*Swargarohana*	Kabi Karna

Generally speaking, these *Pala*-s do not exhibit any great imagination in the treatment of the themes. They are mostly stereotyped and repetitive and almost all of them are designed to illustrate the power and glory of either Satyanarayana or Satyapira. They are narrative and descriptive in character and have hardly any use for symbol or metaphor. The language is simple, unvarnished and colloquial. All except the *Vandana Pala* of Kabi Karna have a story to tell. This one has only invocatory lines for Ganesha, Saraswati, Shiva, Durga and a host of gods and goddesses of Orissa inhabiting its different regions. Special mention may also be made of Dwija Kashinatha's *Ugratara Pala* in which each line of all the verses starts with the fifth vowel of the Oriya alphabet.

Pala thus incorporated in its fold an extensive repertoire drawn from Sanskrit plays and classics and also Puranic and contemporary *Kavya* literature. One has to assume that the *Gayaka* was a scholar for he had to remember all the references, improvise and introduce a number of relevant texts to describe scenes, situations, events etc. and establish parallel similes and metaphors through the technique of association.

Over the years *Pala* also incorporated in its fold a vast body of local and rural legends, proverbs and popular sayings. These were no doubt used more by the *Palia*-s as interludes or as a counterpoint to the thread of the recited story of the *Gayaka*. Generally a *Gayaka* has one *Palia*. But occasionally there could be four *Palia*-s, the five together symbolising a representative of each of the five deities.



There has been considerable debate among scholars and historians of literature as to whether *Pala* is folk literature or a folk performing art. In

the cultural heritage of Orissa, the folk and classical elements are often combined. Besides, there was also an admixture of tribal elements. In the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, for example, one can see elements of all these and it is truly a fine example of a folk-classical-tribal continuum. Secondly, poetry and song were closely linked and quite often poetry, for example, the medieval love lyrics and portions of Upendra Bhanja's *kavya*-s, could be set to music and sung. As a matter of fact, the compositions of Gopalkrushna, Kavisurya and Banamali continue to provide a large part of the repertoire of the music accompanying Odissi dance.

Pala thus incorporated not only a vast body of classical and modern, popular and elitist literature but through its audiovisual presentation helped in their spread and popularisation. The oral tradition of "listening in" to the classics of literature- the Oriya *Bhagabata*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and also other Purana-s was, and continues to be, quite strong. Literature reached the formal illiterates through this process. Being a classical-folk continuum. *Pala* combined the literary contexts, the cognitive elements, the stylisations of important *Kavya*-s, their *alamkara*-s, organisation and other formal qualities with vignettes and sequences from everyday life, including its rural humour, sometimes bordering on crudity and earthy sayings, legends and proverbs.

Pala thus became a unique form of entertainment which held the attention of the rural folk, charmed and entertained them even as it educated them in the basic traditions of both Sanskrit *Kavya* and ancient, medieval and, to an extent, even of modern Oriya poetic creations.



The relationship between the *Gayaka* and the *Palia* helped the combination of folk and elitist traditions. The *Gayaka* and the *Palia* were in a sense in binary opposition:

serious :	non-serious
religious :	profane
Sanskritic :	folk
decorum :	crudity

In certain cases, for example, after the *Gayaka* has completed the recitation of some important Sanskrit *shloka*-s, the *Palia* would humbly beg permission to contradict the interpretation given by the *Gayaka* and give an alternative version of the text. This would no doubt be a distorted meaning but he would make it credible sometimes by the use of a pun or alternative meanings of words. But often he would beg to present a slightly different version. The objective behind such a move would be parody and satire. It is necessary to mention here that *Pala* has demonstrated a great capacity to hold up to ridicule and satirise social evils. The miserly and ignorant king, the *vaidya*, who knows nothing of diagnosis but is addicted to drink, the mischievous minister with sinister motives, the corrupt official, the pompous pundit showing off his knowledge, tyrant rulers, selfish leaders who hardly care for the people but accumulate fortunes at the cost of ordinary folk —all of them come in for effective, hilarious and trenchant criticism. To cite an example, Pandit Gopabandhu Das has four celebrated lines which are given below in Oriya script, its transliteration in Roman script and its English rendering:



[illegible]

Misu mora deha e desha matire
Deshabasi chali jaantu pithire
Deshara Swarajya pathe jete gada
Puru tahin padi mora mansa bada.

Let my body mingle with the country's soil.
Let my country-men walk on my back.
Let my bones and flesh
Fill the crevices in the path of swarajya

After these lines are recited by the *Gayaka*, the Palia would say that all this is right but what our leaders have learnt from Gopabandhu is something slightly different. And then he would recite the lines, slightly, but significantly, altering the words, so that the meaning becomes completely different as will be seen from the following excerpt.

[illegible]

Deshabasi sabu mishantu matire
Ambhe chalijibu tankari pithire
Ambha swarth pathe achhi jete gada
Puru tahin padi tanka mansahada

Let all my countrymen mingle with the soil
I will walk on their backs
Let all the crevices on the path of my interest
Be filled with their flesh and bone.

Sometimes the *Palia* may just recite these lines even without the *Gayaka* reciting the lines from the poet Gopabandhu. The audience (which generally knows Gopabandhu's lines) notices this and responds to the parody.



To cite another example, Jagannath Das's Oriya *Bhagabat* is perhaps the one literary work which is universally known, read and listened to in rural Orissa. It is composed in rhymed verse with nine letters in each line. Sometimes, using the same metre and line-scheme and the form of the sage Shuka narrating the story to King Parikshita, the *Palia* would improvise lines severely critical of the rapacity of a modern Brahmin priest, his ridiculous actions and his total ignorance.

Suna Pariksha Naranatha
Tampada Sukhua Pakhalbhat.
Shree akshara bibarjita
Chita paita sushobhita.
Bila bachhibaku aaga
Dahi chudaku bagha
Sandhya Gayatri hina
Bilaru badhhanti mina.
Pothiru naphitai dori
Jajamana chaula chori

Listen O King Pariksha!
(He takes) salted dry fish and soaked rice.
He does not even know the alphabets
but is well decorated with the sacred thread and sandal woodpaste.
Always prompt to go for deweeding operations in the field,
he jumps up at the prospect of a feast in a funeral ceremony.
He does not know even the evening gayatri mantra
and goes out to catch small fishes in the paddy-fields.
He never even opens the palm-leaf manuscripts
but is great in stealing the rice of his jajamana
or client.



In the *Gayaka*'s recitation, the recurring literary themes are: the different segments of the day such as morning, noon, evening and night; the six seasons, nature, the landscape and the human emotions associated with the seasons; the beauty of nature embodied in rivers, the sky, the hills and clouds, bird songs and forests; and woman, that eternal theme of poetry, her beauty and grace, her face, her body, her eyes, her coiffure, her dress etc. While he describes any of these, the *Gayaka* brings in the various ways in which different poets have dealt with these subjects and shows his brilliance by comparing and contrasting them.

Pala, however, is not merely literature. It is poetry that is sung and acted. The *Gayaka*, therefore, is expected to be quite conversant with *raga*-s and *ragini*-s, *tala* and *laya*. Most of the *raga*-s are of course Odissi *raga*-s and about twelve are usually employed. Kavisurya Baladev Rath's celebrated *Champu*-s and Upendra Bhanja's *Kavya-s* are well-suited for musical rendering, as also the works of Gangadhar Meher.

The more well-known and frequently used Odissi *raga*-s in *Pala* recitation are : Chokhi, Kamodi, Baradi, Bangala-sri, Ramakeri, Kalahansa-kedara, Ashadha-shukla, Rasakulya, Kannada, Ahari, Mangala-gujjari and Pahadi-kedara. From the point of view of *raga*-base, one can broadly divide the epics and poetic works of Oriya poets (used in *Pala* recitation) into two groups. In the first group are the works of Radhanath Ray, Gangadhar Meher, and Nandakishore Bala. These three poets mainly employ Banagala-sri, Ramakeri, Rasakulya and Mangala-gujjari *raga*-s. For example, almost the



whole of *Pranayaballari* by Gangadhar Meher is in Bangala-sri *raga*. Nandakishore's *Sharmitstha* and Radhanath Ray's *Chandrabhaga* mainly use Rasakulya *ragas*. These are simple and sweet-sounding *ragas*. Compared to them, the second group of poets use the more difficult *raga*-s like *Chokhi*, Kamodi, Kalahansa-kedara, etc. Upendra Bhanja may be regarded as the leader in this group and most of his works are used in *Pala* recitation. *Bidagdha Chintamani* of Abhimanyu Samanta Singhar and Dinakrushna Das's *Rasakallola* belong to the same group. Sri Golakh Pradhan, a modern epic writer, who is considered in the line of Upendra Bhanja, has written three epics (*Satyabhama, Indurekha* and *Dakshina*) and most of them are in the pattern of *raga*-s used by Upendra Bhanja. These three epics are also very liberally used in *Pala* recitation.

These Odissi *raga*-s do not have much in common with classical Hindustani *raga*-s. They are generally not related to a specific emotion or *rasa*. For example, one may render a song in Chokhi *raga* both in *hasya rasa* or *karuna rasa*. Secondly, the *raga*-s are also time-specific: particular *raga*-s are not supposed to be sung at a particular time of the day or night.

The *tala*-s, too, do not fall within the framework of the *tala*-s used in Hindustani classical music. The singer varies the *tala* according to the convenience of his recitation.



The voice of the *Gayaka* has to be attractive since an unmusical rendering will hardly make an impact on the audience. When the *Gayaka* has just one *Palia*, the former assumes a number of roles in succession and has thus to express himself adequately and effectively in each role. The

celebrated *Gayaka* Harinatha (of recent times) would act the role of Harishchandra, Shaivya. Rohitaswa and the keeper of the funeral-ground with equal ease and grace. As Shaivya, he would make the audience weep with his wailing for the dead son and then assume the calm and collected voice of King Harishchandra. In the presentation of the theme and in its enactment, there is emphasis on *rasa* and all the traditional nine *rasa*-s are delineated. A degree of histrionic talent is thus very necessary for the *Gayaka* and very often he delineates a theme through the single actor assuming manyroles with the *Palia* merely acting as a counter-point facilitating the role-change.

Among the distinguished *Gayaka*-s of modern times are Niranjana Kara and Harekrishna Nath, who were honoured with the titles of *Gayaka Mani* and *Gayaka Ratna* respectively.

More recently some *Gayaka*-s have tried to introduce contemporary themes in *Pala* but, by and large, they have not succeeded in this effort. The *Pala* has to be a verse form, suitable for recitation. Sometimes it is set to music to be sung as song. Some of the social or political themes of our times do not lend themselves to such a presentation. It is, however, possible that at a future date such *Pala*-s may be composed and presented. One hopeful sign is that a few educated individuals have begun to present *Pala* as a part-time profession. Perhaps they will be able to add significantly to the themes or manner of presentation of *Pala*. The best among the *Pala* *Gayaka*-s of former times did not have much formal schooling; even though theywere versed in Sanskrit and regional literatures. It is also heartening to note that emphasis is placed by the



educated *Gayaka*-s on the traditional qualities of *Pala*, including its religious aspects, *Puja* with peace invocation, and that traditional costume and jewellery is worn. This augurs well for the future growth of a traditional literary-performing art-form combining tradition and change.

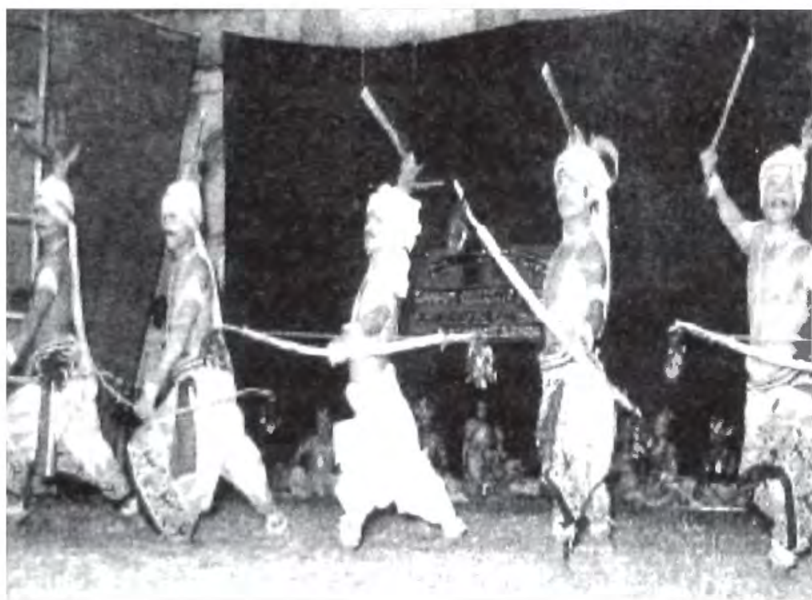
Chhau Dance Of Mayurbhanj

Introduction

Since Independence, there has been a flowering of interest in the classical and folk culture of India. This has been, to a large extent, due to the Akademi at the State level and the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi. Attempts have been made to analyse the intricate aspects of these dance forms, some of which almost faced extinction at the time of Independence. Various aspects of their idiom, vocabulary, repertoire, gesture, thematic and aesthetic qualities have been studied and attempts have also been made to relate various dance forms to their folk background and cultural milieu. In short, the perspective in the sphere of dance and music has been to view them as integral expressions of folk culture and its worldview. Simultaneously, the different dance forms and folk cultures have also been sought to be viewed as aspects of an all-embracing Indian folk culture whose most significant contribution has been the search for a unifying idiom and symbol in the midst of pervading diversities.

The Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, however, until only recently, seems to have been left out of this current rage of cultural efflorescence. Various aspects of the dance, its origin and growth, its themes, the musical accompaniment, the gestures and aesthetic moods of the performances are yet to be studied in detail and related to the relevant aspects of folk culture in the neighbourhood. In the absence of any such detailed investigation, one finds it somewhat difficult to accept a large number of prevailing generalisations on various aspects of the dance. The dance has, only in the last five to ten years, been brought into an all-India





focus but its relationship with similar dance forms is yet to be studied in any detail. The Akademi both at the Centre and at the State level have to go a long way in helping this dance to survive and grow, not merely by way of financial assistance, but, what is more important, by organising and directing research into different aspects of this dance.

Origin

When Mayurbhanj Chhau was presented at Calcutta during the Emperor's visit in 1911, *The Englishman*, Calcutta, observed: "The war dance of Oriya Paikas, it is understood, was much admired by their Majesties. The Paikas danced their best and furnished a relief from the monotony of silent processions". *The Statesman* dated 6.1.1912 commented, "The dance drew universal appreciation. The Oriya Paik dance was a great spectacle". A Mayurbhanj Chhau group-dance or *Mela nacha* (as distinguished from solo or *Futnacha*) is always spectacular, vigorous, and characterised by rhythmic fury rising to a crescendo at the end. One of the commonly held viewpoints regarding the origin of Chhau - and one unfortunately held without much significant evidence - emphasises its martial origin and character. It is, for example, said that the word "Chhau" itself derives from "Chhauni" (military cantonment or camp) and that the basic posture and stance of the dance, its steps and gaits, and the absence of female dancers, all point to its original martial character. The prevalence of non-martial and non-warlike themes derived from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Purana*-s, the emphasis on the Krishna legend, the large number of folk subjects and the derivation of a wide variety of basic postures and *Bhangi*-s from the daily



ritual of the ordinary household are sought to be explained (or rather explained away) by the general observation that these items must have entered the Chhau repertoire somewhat later. No attempt is made to explain when, why or how such intermixture did take place. The confusion seems to flow primarily from the over-riding emphasis on 'foot-work' (as distinguished from *hasta mudra*-s, i.e., gestures of the hand, or *abhinaya*, i.e., facial expressions and movements of the eyes, lips, etc.) that characterises Chhau and this is argued as another point in favour of the thesis of its martial origin. It is said that in the formative stages the dancers used to dance with sword or spears etc., and hence the hands and the face did not convey as much of the visual imagery of the dance as the feet did. It is, however, not explained why in most folk dances the feet render the rhythmic fury and vigour of the dance much more competently than the hands and the face. This is not to deny the possibility of Chhau deriving some inspiration from the martial spirit of the local people, but to maintain that it is basically a martial dance and that its marriage with the tribal dance *Amdalia-Jamdalia-Nacha* produced the Chhau form would perhaps be a little too clever. Such a view can be taken seriously only after a more detailed investigation into its origins.

There are some who believe that Chhau is derived from the Oriya word "CHHAI" or "CHHALANA" or "CHHABI" or "CHHAYA" meaning the attempt to show off, hypocrisy, pictures or shadow respectively. Now it is almost certain that initially Mayurbhanj Chhau used masks. It was only during the time of the King Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo (around the turn of the last century) that masks were discarded. Old records of the Mayurbhanj Estate



indicate that elaborate methods were employed to prepare these masks, which were often multicoloured. The primary colours used were, however, ochre, white, brick-red and black. (It may not be out of place here to mention that the tribal Santals who are justly reputed for their skill in painting their walls use these four colours even today.) These masks must have looked like painted pictures. They also served the purpose of camouflaging the character's real face and gave him the intended stylised look and this was perhaps looked upon as artistic 'hypocrisy'. The dancers did "show off" quite a bit. Etymologically, therefore, it is possible that Chhau was derived from analogous words in the Oriya language.

Links with the Tribal Dance

The martial origin of Chhau is far from clear. The Mayurbhanj region of north Orissa was not the scene of many battles in historical times and the people who lived in this area were not particularly famous for their martial traditions. There are no documentary or archaeological records which point to any martial tradition in this area. Historians are agreed that the Kheriyas ruled the northern part of Mayurbhanj in the eighteenth and ninteenth centuries. Theywere an aboriginal tribe and paid tribute to the Mayurbhanj Raja in honey, *maina* birds, parrots etc. The rule of the Kheriyas was in turn succeeded by that of the Bhuiyans and the Dharuas. Maharaja Jadunath Singh Deo's attempts to obtain an increased annual tribute met with stiff resistance from the Dharuas and he invaded the Bamanghati area in Mayurbhanj district to bring it under his direct control. The Santals and the Kols came to the help of the Mayurbhanj Maharaja at a crucial phase of







the battle. This is the historical background to the Mayurbhanj Estate's cordial links with the Santals and the Kols. As a matter of fact, the enlightened rulers of Mayurbhanj have always accepted the integration of the non-tribal Hindus and the tribals as part of their policy. The Santals, the Kols and the Mundas were specifically encouraged to participate in the Hindu festivals, the most important of which was the Ratha Yatra at Baripada. The Santals also participated in the festivals related to the worship of Shiva. In the Mayurbhanj village of Badamtalia, a Santal constructed a small Shiva temple by raising donations and a Hindu priest was engaged for the worship of Lord Shiva in this temple. During Shivaratri, the people of the region congregate to observe this Hindu festival and the Santals also participate in it in very large numbers.

These facts point to the close integration of the Santals and non-Santals of Mayurbhanj in the patterns of their social and cultural life. The worship of Shiva in modified form is accepted as a part of the Santali mythology. Maranburu, the highest God of the Santali pantheon, is literally the God of the Great Hills. Occasionally, the enlightened Santals think of Maranburu as another name for Lord Shiva. It is, therefore, probable that the Chhau dance which emerged as a folk dance related to the rituals of Shiva worship imbibed from the very beginning certain elements of the tribal dance. This author has collected the invocation songs of the Santals in the Mayurbhanj area. These songs (known as *Bakhen*-s) have a ritualistic basis and are generally linked to the occasions punctuating the cycle of the agricultural seasons. The text of these invocatory songs has a degree of similarity with the prayers offered to Lord Shiva during the initiation of



disciples into the practice of the Chhau dance. The prayers are generally pleas for the welfare of the community. Thematically, many of the Santal dances share some of the traits of the Chhau dances. The *Dantha* dance of the Santals, for example, includes a number of themes from the *Ramayana*, and their parallels are to be found in certain Chhau dances such as the dance number, *Jambeb*. A number of Santali dances based on the Krishna legend and incidents taken from the *Ramayana* bear a close resemblance to the folk dance items performed by the villagers of the district and in particular the *Mahanta* community. A systematic analysis of the melodic pattern of the orchestra and the movements of the dance of Chhau will in all probability indicate a number of similarities between these two groups of dances. Many Santali dances are in the nature of rural pantomimes; different kinds of agricultural operations, gestures of greeting, impersonations of different kinds of birds and animals often occur. The Chhau also includes dance imitation of birds and animals (for example, Jatayu). Specific items in the Santali dance (*Lagren, Baha, Dahar, Jadur* and *Rinja*) need to be systematically compared with items in the Chhau repertoire, with a view to discerning in detail the similarities and differences. The Santals mainly use two types of drums: the *tumdak* with its cylinder of clay and the *tamak* with its hide-covered bowl. While the *tumdak* is played with the hands, the *tamak* is beaten with sticks. The former maintains the rhythm; the latter echoes and adds to the depth of the song. Somewhat similar drums are used in Chhau dance. The use of the mahuri and the flute in Chhau dance is akin to the use of these instruments in Santali dances.



Similarities with Ritual and the Folk Tradition

One might reasonably trace the origin of Chhau primarily from the folk dances of the cultural region of North Orissa (in particular, the Mayurbhanj district), with a very large admixture of tribal elements. During its evolution it has acquired a discipline and rigour; and this has doubtless given it, at least in part, the qualities of classical dance. As Kapiḷa Vatsyayan has observed: Mayurbhanj Chhau presents many problems of classification in terms of the categories of Indian dance styles. One may, however, conclude that it is a very interesting and exciting blend of classical, folk and tribal elements with a strong ritualistic content.

The ritualistic and specifically tribal aspects of the dance need to be investigated in much greater detail. The Chhau dance traditionally, as also today, used to be part of the *Chaitra Parva*. The *Chaitra Parva* which falls in April has the twin aspects of spring's delicate wistfulness and the vibrant energy of the coming summer. It is a time when the sal trees are in blossom everywhere. The landscape has bright patches of red and purple, with the *simul*, *kusum* and the *palas* flowering all around along with the blazing warmth of the copper and brown colours of fallen leaves. The atmosphere is surcharged with the languor of spring gradually merging into the elemental energy of the sun heralding the advent of summer. The local tribals also have their own festivals during this period. The Santals have the *pata* festival in mid-April. In Mayurbhanj and Singhbhum the *pata* festival has essential similarities with the *Bhokta* ritual.

Evidently, the word *Bhokta* is linked to the Sanskrit word *Bhakta*. The *Bhokta*-s were hereditary worshippers and belonged neither to the Brahmin or Karan (Kayastha)



castes. In fact, they were usually from the lower castes. They used to enjoy rent-free land gifted to them by the kings of Mayurbhanj. After the abolition of the Zamindari system they lost the right and title to the land. In earlier days, the *Bhokta*-s used to roam the streets of the town of Baripada singing hymns in praise of Shiva and praying for the welfare of the king of Mayurbhanj. Today we see them at the end of this journey appearing around midnight on the stage where the Chhau dance is being performed. They are dressed in red-coloured dhotis and enter with great fanfare, burning incense and sprinkling ritually prepared powders into blazing fires (*mashal*- s) which sometimes send up leaping tongues of fire seven to eight feet high. The *Bhakta*-s form different groups, each under a *Pata-Bhokta*. They observe a strict code of conduct and are invested with sacred threads and garlands of *mallika* and *champak*. They also carry canes. During this period their own *gotra*-s are changed to *Shiva-gotra*. They are referred to as *Betra Sanyashi* and *Sutra Sanyashi*.

This ceremony used to be associated with the *Uda* or the swinging-by-hook festival which has now been declared a criminal act by legislation because of the danger to human lives. It is not confined to the Santals alone; the Mundaris and Oraons of Singhbhum and Sundergarh districts also observe during the month of April the famous *Sarhul* festival. This is the beginning of the hunting excursions of the Mundaris and Oraons. W.G. Archer has rightly compared it to the Christian festival of Easter as the two festivals correspond to "an exaltation in the brilliant weather and the flowering trees and the sense of sprouting life" (*The Blue Grove*, p.36) The *Chaitra Parva* in Mayurbhanj also used to have a number of ritual aspects. In an article in the Mayurbhanj Gazettee



(Volume No.1 , No.3, April,1932), there is a reference to the *Bhokta* ritual commencing on the seventeenth day of Chaitra. The *Bhokta*-s used to fast (like the *Patua*-s) before the goddesses. Generally these *Bhokta*-s now sing *bhajan*-s before the goddesses and Mahadeva during the four days of the ritual, culminating in Pana Sankranti. They perform four different Pata ceremonies; *Kanta Pata* (walking or rolling on thorns), *Nian Pata* (fire-walking), *Jhula Pata* or *Ugra Pata* (hanging , head down, on fire) and *Uda Pata* (rotating on a horizontal pole). It is interesting to observe that the *Danda Nata* has its own system of *Bhokta*-s, as also the worship of Shiva and Shakti, and a large number of dance performances which resemble aspects of the Chhau. The mention of *Hakand* in *Danda Nata* is also significant. *Uda Pata* and *Pansi Pata* (jumping from a height) also figure in *Danda Nata.*

The *Danda Nata* and *Danda Puja* of Southern Orissa have similarities with the *Bhokta* ritual. With *Danda* comes the *Jhamu* dance. The worshippers are known as *Dandua* and their presiding deity Shiva is called *Dand*. The entire objective of the *Jhamu* dance and the *Danda Nata* would seem to be the sublimation and control of the body and the sense organs. The *Dandua*-s, as also the *Jhamu* dancers, walk on fire and bring to mind the ancient exploits of the *Savara*-s, the Saora tribes in the forest. The main dancer in the *Danda Nata* usually narrates a tale about Shiva as the prime source of *gyan* and *bhakti.*

It could be that the *Gajan* and *Charak* pujas of Bengal have distant similarities with the *Bhokta* and *Danda* dances. In East Bengal, those performing *Gajan puja* undertake fasts, perform elaborate rituals and worship Lord Shiva. The prime actor is known as *Maini* and he dances as Shiva while another dancer joins him as Gouri or Parvati. During



the dance he wears a 'head' and this has some resemblance to the 'mask' of the Chhau of Seraikella and the mask used in the early years of the Chhau of Mayurbhanj. The main priest of the *Danda Nata* is called *Maniama*. This suggests a relationship with *Maini*.

There was a time when about twenty thousand *Bhokta*-s used to congregate during the *Danda Nata* ceremony in the Chandaneswar village of Balasore district. The dance of *Chaiti Ghoda*, prevalent among the fishermen of the coastal districts, has also a similar ritualistic significance and symbolism, which may not be entirely unrelated to the cultural matrix underlying the Chhau performance. Besides, the worship of Bhairava during the *Chaitra Parva*, the traditional visit to the dance arena of the *Jatraghata* and *Nishaghata* perhaps point to the intricate connection between Shaiva and Shakta worship and the origins of the Chhau dance. Thus, before one can conclude that Chhau dance is primarily martial in origin and spirit, these various aspects of possible inter-relationships and inspiration have to be studied. That it has positive folk inspiration is beyond doubt. The tribal orientation is also extremely probable. The Santals and Bhumijas, if not the Mundaris and the Oraons, seem to have contributed, in no small measure, to its evolution. Similarly inspiration may perhaps have also been derived from the Shiva and Shakti cult. More light needs to be shed on these possible relationships and the viewing of Chhau as an expression of the Spring Festival and its different manifestations before one can arrive at any possible final conclusion about its origin.



A Composite of Various Elements

The vigour and fury of the movements in Mayurbhanj Chhau bring to mind the dynamism of Santali and Munda

tribal dances. Besides, there is the relationship to Shiva worship, to the concept of the *Tandava* dance, and to Bhokta rituals. What is worth noting is that even the delineation of more delicate emotions (like love) is through vigorous foot-work and massive expression of vitality. There is very little that is really feminine or tender in Chhau. Grace is always married to vigour and emotion to energy.

The item *Sabara-toka*, for instance, combines refinement and strength through the various movements of the dance. The Sabara-toka advances through the dense jungle with a majestic and elegant sweep; he hears the sound of an animal and jumps into action. His body becomes a dynamic instrument poised to kill and then there is the grace which follows the killing of the animal) as he splashes water on his tired face ! The entire sequence of movements delineates various moods and emotions. The dance item *Dandi* conveys a more austere mood since it portrays the young initiate symbolically leaving his house to perform severe penance and yogic practices. *Kailash Leela* is much more romantic in its conception and brings in the divine maya of the supreme God through a series of rapidly shifting sequences.

An item like *Tamudia Krishna*, for example, combines a subdued mood (embodied in the final scene when Krishna breaks Radha's pitcher) with the sheer violence and verve of the folk-rhythm which informs the entire sequence. When Krishna dances in this number it is not just an emotive and tender love-dance; the dance exudes, simultaneously, a sense of kinetic energy. The essence of man-hood is vigorously asserted and even the flute is waved about in an almost furious manner. But this is not allowed to detract from the lyricism of the theme and its aesthetic grace. This



particular dance number (like other dance numbers in the tradition) achieves a fusion between the vitality, the lack of sophistication of the folk-style and the restraint of a formal dance. It is not so stylised as to be a mere form, a desiccated mask, a shadow without substance. Nor is it just raw energy or rhythm without discipline or organisation.

An aspect of this form which demands attention is the formal codification of the idiom and vocabulary of the dance and its synchronisation with the musical accompaniment (both instrumental and oral) wherever the latter happens to be present. Under royal patronage, Chhau definitely flourished as an eclectic art. Records prove that the Gurus used to be taken to watch the performances of not merely Western ballet and ball-room dances, but also the dance of the Nolias of Puri. This willingness to be exposed to other dance forms was, however, accompanied by a very curious reluctance to codify the basic vocabulary and idiom of the dance. This built-in deficiency has continued to bedevil Chhau.

Critics have sought to divide the basic movements of the dance into six *topka*-s and thirty-six *ufli*-s, relating six *ufli*-s to each *topka* in the manner of the relationship between the *raga*-s and *ragini*-s. But this relationship has yet to be formally described and adequately explained. The theme-content is derived from a large variety of subjects including the daily chores of the common man and the imitation of the movements of birds and animals. The snake-dance, the Garuda in *Garuda-bahan* and the deer-dance are cases in point. Curt Sachs, the noted authority on primitive dance, has observed that the essential significance of imitating the movements of animals lies in the primitive belief that those animals



could be subjugated and conquered through such a portrayal. This interpretation has also gained support from several noted anthropologists. The basic postures and the *Bhangi*-s, the underlying *Dharan*-s and their aesthetic background have, therefore, to be examined in the context of the broad cultural matrix that informs it.

Lyrics and Music

Further, serious attempts have also to be made to compile the lyrics accompanying the dance numbers. It is a pity even after years of performance there is, as yet, no comprehensive and definite compilation of the different solo, duet and group dance-numbers or the lyrics which accompany them. These lyrics are largely derived from the *Jhoomar* and the local folk-songs. These have to be systematically codified so that the trainees perceive the delicate relationship between the meaning and significance of the lyric and its visual representation through the dance. The aesthetic appreciation of the lyric is an important item in the proper presentation of any dance and more particularly a folk dance. In the absence of such appreciation, the dance runs the risk of degeneration into a mechanical and routinised movement of the body.

These lyrics can be broadly divided into four groups. Some of them have a strong admixture of Bengali. The songs accompanying *Tamudia Krishna* and *Nisitha Milan* are of this nature. The song accompanying the dance item *Kirata Arjuna* is closer to Bhojpuri. There are also lyrics which are almost indistinguishable from modern Hindi. Fourthly, we have items where the accompanying songs (as in Odiya and *Nithura Kalia*) are rendered in chaste or colloquial Oriya. Here are a few



examples of the original songs translated into English.

Embarassed by her relatives and afraid of them,
Rai (Radha)treads the path slowly
With the golden water pot in her arms
To fetch water from the river Yamuna.
She does not see Srimadhava, wonders what she should do,
Where she should go..
He, who has snatched her away from her kula
And ruined life in the family,
Stands there under the Kadam tree.
(from *Tamudia Krishna*)

Don't be misled any more
By Shyama's overtures of love
Ignore His sweet words.
The guru of lecherous and wayward men
He is the prince of traitors.
In this wide world
There is no robber equal to him.
He deserted the women of Gopa.
And left for Mathura.
The flag of His misdeeds has been unfurled in Gopa,
And what a monument to Shyama's accomplishment!,
(from *Nithura Kalia*)

I would go across hills and mountains
Eat the jungle fruit.
I would sleep on your bed
And shower you with kisses.
(from *Kirat Arjuna*)



It is not possible to state with any accuracy when such lyrics came into the Chhau dance. Originally, Chhau was no doubt a form of non-verbal theatre. It is possible that during the 1920s and 30s, and particularly because of the association of the Chhotrai Sahebs and Routrai Sahebs of the Estate, a need was felt to introduce some song accompaniment. The lyrics, however, cannot be said to be either original or meaningful and their authorship is also far from certain. The dance numbers could as well do without them.

Luckily for Chhau, there has been an almost continuous tradition of very able dance teachers. Till now they have, however, depended far too much on individual inspiration and their own sense of improvisation. While any creative dance does depend on such improvisation to some extent, the need for consolidation and codification cannot be denied. Unfortunately, this is yet to begin in a systematic way. Those who play the instruments also need to be guided by a regular system of musical notation. The Ranga Baja is after all a form of orchestra, however imperfect. It cannot do without a formal system of notation to guide the drummers and the Mahuri players. In the absence of such a system, there is a genuine danger of too much of clever improvisation and of lack of symmetry between the dance as visual imagery and its auditory accompaniment. One also notices a gradual tendency to incorporate elements a lighter tunes through the Mahuri and the flute. Over the last decade, this tendency to introduce softer music, often an imitation of film tunes, has increased and is something that must be seriously discouraged and discarded. In brief, the dance items have to be studied as an integral system of *Nritta, Nritya* and *Natya.* Because of the large number of character- dances,



an informal system of choreography cannot be avoided, but the dances require to be systematised.

Decor and Costumes

Not much attention has hitherto been given to the costumes used for the dance numbers. The importance of costume designing in a folk dance form can hardly be over-emphasised. As early as July 1934, the poet Lakshmikanta Mahapatra (who visited the Chhau dance of that year at Baripada) regretted the tendency to lay too much emphasis on glittering dresses of artificial silk. What is required is thorough planning of the sets of each dance number. The costumes should necessarily be traditional , and must harmonise with the theme, the period to which it relates, and sound aesthetic concepts.

Training and Encouragement

The Mayurbhanj Chhau Nrutya Pratisthan has initiated a programme to attract regular trainees, and offered them stipends to learn the dance. In the absence of such encouragement in the past the learners used to be mainly part-time workers, such as plumbers, mechanics, and even rickshaw-pullers. Under those circumstances many of the trainees could hardly afford the time or energy for sustained and regular practice. Many of them used to brush up their knowledge and technique of the dance just two or three weeks before the Annual Festival.

Historically Chhau has passed through many phases of growth and decline. During the rule of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo (1868- 1882) , Chhau dance enjoyed immense popularity and rich princely patronage. Inspired by the Maharaja's example, the then



Chhotrai Saheb Brundaban Chandra Bhanja Deo assumed the responsibility for the training and performance of Uttar Sahi. He himself used to take part in the dance. His brother Gukul Chandra Bhanja Deo was in the charge of Dakhin Sahi. The main road running east-west from the palace divides Baripada town into Uttar Sahi and Dakhin Sahi. After Sriram Chandra Bhanja's investiture in 1892, his brother Shyam Chandra and Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo took charge of the performance of the Uttar Sahi and Dakhin Sahi respectively. These two brothers participated in the dance and arranged for an annual grant for each *sahi*. The training continued throughout the year and new dance items were also introduced. One record suggests that an outlay of Rs.800/-was always sanctioned for the introduction of a new dance item and included the cost of costumes and other accessories.

Chhau dance suffered a partial eclipse after the death of Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo in 1912. The Annual grant for each sahi was reduced and until the early thirties the dance languished. Then Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanja Deo increased the annual grant to Rs.5,000/-for each sahi and took a sustained interest in the form. Dancers received handsome rewards, including land grants. Teams of Ostads, dancers and committee members of each sahi were often sent by the Maharaja to observe the performances of Uday Shankar, Amala Shankar and other exponents of Indian dance. This period witnessed the evolution of expertise and high technical standards and a revival of the dance. But in the wake of the merger of the princely States into Orissa (in 1949), there was a decline. Princely patronage was no longer available and the state government did not move in to fill the vacuum. Bhabani



Kumar Das took it upon himself to keep alive this dance form with the help of Ostads and artistes and presented special shows before the first Governor-General of India, Sri Rajgopalchari and Prime Minister Pandit Nehru. The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and the State Akademi came to the rescue of the dance through suitable financial assistance. The present difficulty is to maintain sustained interest and regular practice so urgently required for a proper performance. Chhau dance is by its very nature so vigorous that there is a danger of thinness in performance in case of a long gap in training. Many of these dancers and dance teachers have to depend on other avenues of employment. Some are agriculturists by profession, others are small traders. But the majority do not have any settled and assured source of income. This makes it difficult for them to continue dance practice in a systematic manner. Assurance of a number of performances inside or outside the State can provide a substantial income to the dancers and the poorer among them can then give up other part-time activities and concentrate on the dance. This calls for organisation and efforts from all concerned. A systematic training scheme was drawn up during 1970-72. A stipend is now being offered to the trainees. The Sangeet Mahabidyalaya at Bhubaneswar has opened a course on Chhau and it has become extremely popular. Three teachers have been brought on loan from the Mayurbhanj Chhau Nrutya Pratisthan. It is hoped that with gradually expanding popularity, Chhau can be performed in different parts of the country almost on a regular basis and this can generate sufficient funds for the dancers to devote themselves full-time to the art.



On the occasion of the Annual festival in 1971 a

four-day discussion and demonstration programme was organized, in addition to the usual dance performances at night. Dance troupes from the interior of the district came to compete. As many as ten teams participated, over and above the two main teams from Baripada proper, the Dakhin Sahi and Uttar Sahi. The items presented by the lesser known groups from the interior were an eye-opener. There were very promising dancers, who with regular training and the benefit of better gurus could grow into mature artistes. Also in evidence were certain charming variations in musical accompaniments, lyrics and costumes as also the entire approach to the dance. Some of these regional variations inside the district need to be encouraged. In particular, two items, *Garuda Bahana* and *Kalachakra,* presented by the *Jambani* and *Sansimulia* parties were considered to be of a very high order and given special prizes.

The future growth of Chhau lies in the direction of a systematic investigation into some of the areas of uncertainty mentioned above so that this very artistic and vigorous folk-art can gain the recognition which it so richly deserves. It is a pity that this dance has not yet been performed in different parts of the country in any significant way and unfortunately it has not attracted the attention of dance critics from different parts of India. The relationship of different aspects of the dance with similar dance forms in other parts of the country should be explored as also its links with the folk culture of the area. One has to ensure that this extremely vigorous and interesting dance form is not merely sustained; it must evolve and flower.

Jatra, The Open-Air Theatre

Literally, jatra means a journey or the beginning of a journey. Some feel it had its origin in the ritual-based journey of the gods in traditional festivals. Some Indologists like C P Horrwitz say that "even the Vedic age knew Jatra, a venerable heirloom of Aryan antiquity". But it would seem to be a rather ambitious claim. The derivation of this from classical-religious roots is rather uncertain. In fact, Prof. A.B. Keith has taken a view totally different. According to him "the popular side has survived through the ages in a rough way" and the refined and sacerdotalised vedic drama passed without a direct descendant.

Jatra had, from the beginning, elements of ritual songs and dances which were associated, one way or the other, with religious festivals. In fact, Jatra is a generic word which includes a large variety of folk performances and celebration in Orissa and Bengal. In Orissa, for example, there is the Jhulan Jatra, the Dhanu Jatra, Sitalsasthi Jatra, Dola Jatra, Lord Jagannatha's Chandan Jatra, Ratha Jatra and Puri's Sahi Jatra. While Dhanu Jatra is specific to Bargarh, Sitalasasthi to Sambalpur, Thakurani Jatra to Berhampur, and the Sahi Jatra only to Puri, Dola Jatra and Jhulan Jatra are, more or less, universal forms in Orissa. In Bengal some of these Jatra forms are prevalent but they have also Siva Jatra and Rama Jatra.

Jatra is thus the most comprehensive expression of Orissan folk theatre. Several patterns have been in existence for at least the last 200 years. Dola Jatra, for example, is celebrated on Dola Purnima when the gods are brought together in *Vimanas* for a get-together, something akin to Kulu Dusserah. Performances based on themes of Krishna and other Puranic characters are

also referred to either as Leela or Jatra. Even a fair or mela is also referred to as jatra. Jatra has thus a wide meaning because it is associated with different rituals, celebrations, fairs and festivals. Some are universal, others, local or area-specific.

Jatra is thus a folk festivity which takes various shapes. Sometimes it is also referred to as *Suang* in the rural areas. It has resemblance to what is known as Opera in the Western countries. Some people feel that Pala and Jatra perhaps begun around the same time and most probably during the Mughal period. Jatra as a form of dramatic entertainment has several forms. Scholars have referred to varieties of Jatra in Kerala in 18th century. No formal stagecraft is prescribed for the performance of Jatra. It is performed on a single open stage and the audience sit on all four sides leaving a small path-way along which actors and actresses move from the green room to the stage. On one side of the stage itself, the orchestra is seated. The orchestra is restricted to harmonium, tabla, madala, jhanja and flute. Traditional music accompany some of the sequences in the Jatra. This author has had the privilege of witnessing Jatra performances in his village during the 40s and 50s of the last century. The themes of the jatras are sometimes composed by local writers. Raghunath Parichha's Gopinath Ballav is supposed to be one of the earliest jatras. Both Gopinath Ballav and Babaji were materials for fine performances. Often, however, they are by less celebrated authors who compose themes of Jatras on mostly puranic but also to an extent on social themes.



Jatra can be looked upon as the source material of modern play. Jatra takes on, besides the major actors and actresses, the *Sutradhara*, who gives an

indication of the main theme of the Jatra and the *Vidushak* who provides light entertainment, either related or even unrelated to the theme of the jatra that is being staged. Then there is also the concept of a *Niyati* or personified destiny who comes on the stage at different points of time to indicate the turn of events that are going to take place.

Ramayana and Mahabharata have provided the largest number of themes on which traditional jatra is based. Later on Jatra has sought to modernise itself in themes, in orchestra, in costume and stage arrangement. The traditional audience of a Jatra were prepared for a willing suspension of disbelief when a character supposed to be dead or killed in the stage would get up and walk away after the sequence is over. Sometimes the dead body would be carried away by two or three persons until midway towards the green room among the audience. In a traditional jatra when there was no electricity, there used to be petromax lights hanging in the four corners of the small stage. The actors and actresses themselves speak about their roles and keep the theme of the Jatra moving This author remembers an hilarious incident when in a sequence the queen exiled to the forest with her son by the wily senapati bemoans the dark looking straight at the Petromax light. With the passage of time, Jatra has tried to adopt more sophisticated stage-management techniques. The orchestra has become sophisticated and even moving stage or more than one performance stage have also been devised.



The vast popularity of Jatra today as open-air theatre can be traced to the year 1963. Up to that time, perhaps there was a subdued opposition to women performing in this very old form of



A scene from Jatra

Performing Arts. Since the last four decades, this has changed and Jatra has acquired enormous popularity in Orissa's rural areas and even urban centres. A very large number of performing groups have grown up and many of them have developed a level of professionalism which is admirable. Jatra has come to be popular also among the school boys and there are instances of students with highest degrees of a University performing in it. Several scholars have taken up a study of this form of art. Perhaps the most remarkable person in this field was Baishnav Pani who is admired and called *ganakavi* or a people's poet in the whole of Orissa. The scholars have now come to realise that Jatra in Orissa is perhaps of greater antiquity and has a longer tradition than in Bengal. Its similarity to theatre is obvious. Some scholars believe that in olden days, there were performances of Jatra in certain temples. Jatras were also performed during major festivals like Dola Purnima etc. Some scholars even believe that at the time of emperor Kharavela, almost 2200 years back, Jatra was a popular form of art. In fact, the space in front of Khandagiri-Udaygiri caves have been looked upon by some as an area where dramatic performances used to take place. Since originally, the audience was few, Jatras which were performed in Royal Palaces were uni-directional, i.e., the audience were only on one side. In contrast, performance of Jatra today for general public has either three or mostly four directions.

While today, most jatra performances in rural areas are in open-air, in ancient times jatra used to be performed also in covered spaces. Jatra has certain performance peculiarities different from theatre. For example, since there is a screen in the theatre, the prompters can convey lines to the actors and



actresses on the stage from behind the wings. This is not possible in Jatra as there is no wings or screen in a normal jatra performances. In a theatre, the performers on the stage face the audience in one direction. In a traditional Jatra, they have to move around so that alternatively they face the audience in three or four directions.

Then again, while in theatre, the actors and actresses emerge on to the stage from behind the screen or wings; this is not so in jatra. In the latter, the performers come from the green room which is at a distance through a narrow lane between the audience. The theatre has the benefit of the screen which often can depict a scene directly or by a slide projection. Secondly, lighting arrangements also help the performers. Neither of these, namely, background landscape or sophisticated lighting is available to the performers. In fact, in many rural areas, even today, electricity is not available and the jatra performance takes place with petromax light. The performers in jatra are exposed to the instant reactions of the very large number of audience which, in a theatre, is generally hidden away in semi-darkness. Of course all these are slowly changing and sophisticated jatra performances are approximating slowly to conditions of theatre.

In theatre, the orchestra is generally hidden away from the view of the audience. In jatra, it is not so. The members of the orchestra sit on one side surrounded by the audience and thus they become an integral part of the total performance. *Geeti Natya* is a phrase that is also sometimes used to describe traditional Odissi Jatra. Perhaps that is the better description than Opera because in the western tradition opera is a



performing art, where there is a predominance of music. A time has come to realise that Baishnav Pani and his contribution to Jatra occupies a very high place in Orissa. Several scholars have written extensively about Shri Pani and he has come to acquire a status and popularity which is remarkable. Baishnav Pani wrote a very large number of folk plays. Shri Jogendra Mishra, who was the principal disciple of Shri Pani, is of the opinion that he composed around 800 such folk plays. All his work is perhaps not yet available and some are supposed to be in manuscript stage. But, by now, around 500 of his small plays are available in print. Apart from Baishnav Pani, there are many significant writers who have started writing for the different jatra parties and the jatra performance has, in the last fewyears, come to be quite popular even in the towns and cities.

Jatra is thus a traditional form of folk play or theatre which has undergone significant changes over the centuries and while sophisticated theatre in the urban areas are in decline, the Jatra remains a strong competitor even to the world of films. This is perhaps because of the low cost of tickets and its easy accessibility to the people in many rural areas where cinema halls are not available and may not be available for many years to come. In Orissa's folk performing arts, Jatra thus occupies a pride of place and enjoys greater popularity than any other form of performance.

Gotipua, Mahari, Dalkhai and Chaiti Ghoda
The Classical & Folk Performances

The Gotipua and Mahari Dances

There was a time when young boys in Orissa used to dress up as girls and perform a dance in the villages that gave birth, over time, to classical Odissi dance. There is a feeling that Chaitanya's influence percolated down to the villages of Orissa and in the pattern of the dance performance for Lord Jagannath, Gotipuas in rural areas, particularly of Puri district, performed these dances either in front of small village temples or just at a place where villagers gathered.

Ramananda Rai, a devout vaishnav and acquainted with the royalty favoured dance in the temples performed by boys dressed up as girls. Ramachandra Deva, the Bhoi king who was a great devotee of Lord Jagannath also encouraged the rituals and the gotipua dance in the temples including the dance performances by boys dressed up as girls. Some believe that both of them thought that this way there could be no scope for corruption of the morals of the temple priests or the women dancers.

Gotipuas were given arduous training in physical culture and were chosen by their good looks, fine figures and stamina. They generally never performed after the age of eighteen. The training included not only dance but also learning music, singing and playing drums. Gotipua dance was always associated with Chandan Jatra and Jhulan Jatra. These two festivals were extremely popular and were performed in *Akhada Ghars* of the villages and religious gatherings. The *Akhada*-s were established mostly in Puri district





Gotipua unique pose



and the landed aristocracy encouraged the Gotipua dance by contribution in cash and kind. The great stalwarts of Odissi dance, Guru Kelucharan, and the late Guru Deva Prasad had at one time or another been a part of this dance-pattern or performed Gotipua dance themselves in the rural setting. As against Gotipua dance's rural origin, the Mahari dance which is otherwise called Devadasi dance was a temple dance. Literally, Devadasi is a servant of the gods. In fact, they were supposed to be ritually married to the gods. Scholars have also designated them as wife of the gods. Temple dancing of Lord Jagannath as a ritual finds mention in the inscription of the Ganga rulers as far back as 12th century. In fact, several Puranas, namely, Agnipurana,





Chaiti Ghoda

Vishnu Purana, Srimad Bhagwat and Padma Purana also refer to the temple dances.

It is said that Chodaganga Deva formally introduced Devadasi system in Lord Jagannatha temple. He had established seven habitations (Sahis), one of which was exclusively for the residence of the temple dancers. They were called Maharis and girls from respectable families used to accept it as a honourable profession. During the 16th century, the Devadasi dance form saw a lot of improvement in technique. The Maharis were also categorised into six groups. Both Gotipua dance and the Mahari or Devadasi dance have a number of things in common relating to *mudras* and movement and historically both have contributed to the origin of the classical dance now termed as Odissi. Thus it is reasonably certain that Odissi had its origin both in the folk style of dancing as well as in the ritual temple dances. While the former was performed by boys dressed up as girls in the local temples in Puri and Ganjam often to accompaniment of the traditional music of Orissa, the latter formwas exclusively in the Jagannath temple performed initially only to the singing of Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda*. However, both forms have contributed immensely to the nurturing of the dance form and its continuity and evolution to flower ultimately as a successful classical dance form.

Chaiti Ghoda

This annual festival of the fishermen in the coastal belt of Orissa is meant to worship Baseli or Basuli who is a local form of Bhairavi. But she is also the goddess of the sea and her blessings are essential for



the fishermen's life and safety when they go out to the sea for fishing everyday. Their economic sustenance is almost fully at the mercy of the sea. There are occasional storms, the hurricanes, the onset of monsoon rains. In certain seasons they are lucky to get a good catch; there are times when the catch is very poor. Like the worship of the goddess of crops by others, they worship the goddess of the sea who is also a form of Bhairavi, the ferocious one. During the period of this ritual performance they don't go out into the sea.

The making of the dummy horse with bamboo-strips is quite an art. The frame is covered by either black or yellow cloth. The horse's head, however, is of solid wood and is tightly fitted to its body. The two dancers position themselves suitably within the hollow of the frame and make the dummy horse perform several movements like a live horse. During the dance, the horse is decorated with flowers.

The solo dance of the dummy-horse is generally followed by a Raut and a Rautani who sing and dance along with the horse. The invocatory preliminary song is always for the propitiation of the goddess.

The goddess is also worshipped for having saved their community from external attack. Often too, portions of Achyutananda's *Kaivarta Gita* describing the origin, the social customs and practices of the community are also recited. The couple (the woman is actually a man dressed as a woman) sing in the form of questions and answers and often enough , as in most folk performances, wit and humour are brought in.



Apart from these dancers and the 'Dhol' and 'Mahuri' players, they have also the Jodinagara player. Thus the team works out to three musicians and three dancers.

There are more than one legend regarding the origin of this dance from. One celebrates the crossing of the river Saraju by Rama and Lakshman in the boat of the ferryman. Kaivartas in Orissa are both fishermen (in the sea and rivers) and also ferrymen in the network of rivers of the state. Pleased with the ferryman, Rama had gifted the horse to him. Later, Lord Vishnu blessed the ferryman from danger and ordained that - he and his progeny would live by catching and killing the fish that was attempting to eat up the ferryman.

When the worship begins on the day of Chaitra Poornima the boats used for fishing and the crossing of rivers are washed, cleaned up and sandal paste and vermillion are applied.

Kaivarta lays down not only details about the origin and development of the community but also gives elaborate details of how the horse is to be made, and how on the bamboo-split frame *pata* or indigenous silk sari is to be covered and the horse decked with hibiscus flowers.

This dance-form is thus intimately associated with a particular community of coastal Orissa and celebrates their professional activity in which blessings of the goddess is prayed for.

Dalkhai

Dalkhai is one of the most celebrated folk dances of Orissa. According to scholars it is named after the goddess of fertility. This would appear to be true in case of the Sambalpur and Bolangir forms of the dance. But surprisingly enough the



Dalkhai

Phulbani kondhs also dance this item with sacrifice of cocks in the forest in order to appease the goddess of forest and crops. In that form it appears to be a rather muted or diluted version of the Kondh Meria song and dance which have long since ceased to involve human sacrifice and is now restricted to sacrifice of either buffaloes or goats. Meria, of course, has an elaborate song to accompany the rather chaotic, unorganised form of the dance and uses a meria pillar to which the victim animal is tethered. Both, however, celebrate the prayer to and the appeasement of the goddess of fertility. The prayer in both forms is for good crops. Is the Kondh Dalkhai goddess the Earth goddess or *Dhartani* who is worshipped during meria sacrifice ? Sometimes this author has felt that the Kondh form of Dalkhai has its remote origin in Meria.

The form that is celebrated in Sambalpur and Bolangir is, however, the more popular form. It has been now considered as a major dance form of Orissa and is associated intensely as a "western Orissa" or rather Sambalpuri brand of dance. It has been danced all over Orissa, in various parts of India and has also been taken abroad, like Odissi, Chhau and Ghoomra dances. The place of worship is called 'Dalkhai gudi" and sometimes 'Dalkhai Kothi', that is, the house of the goddess Dalkhai.

This extremely popular dance form which this author witnessed in his college days in the early fifties is really an enchanting form of entertainment. It is colourful, it is vigorous and it resembles the coming of the tide and its receding when the spectacularly dressed girls (women) move forward, backward, in intricate circular movements and charming gyrations. The

dancers mostly young girls entwine their hands around the wrists of other girls and one gets the vision of the waves of the sea. The stylised costume of Sambalpuri sarees worn a little above the ankle, with a handkerchief held by each performer makes it very colourful. The song text is folkish in content and is remarkable for its simplicity and evocative power. They are largely built around love themes and the Radhakrishna theme.

Generally danced during the first fortnight of Ashwina it can also be performed at other times. In fact there is no hard and fast occasion or duration for its performance. In certain areas it is danced during the days from Mahastami to Vijaya Dasami. It is likely that the "Bhai Duj" performance of North India and



"Bhatridwitiya" of West Bengal bear resemblance to this form which is also named as "Bhai Jiuntia".

The accompaniment of Dhol, Nisan and Timki along with the Mahuri that spells out the dance-music, makes it captivating both for its song-text, the musical interludes and the dance which also includes near-squatting sequences.

There are certain parallel forms variously known as Rasarkeli, Dulenach, Rumukjhuman, Jaiphul, Bajnia etc. The song-texts give them their individual names and separate identities but it is easy to see that they are only variations of the same form. The performance is most popular during almost the entire month of Chaitra and during the Phagun Poornima. It is also performed during marriage ceremonies and other religious occasions. It is thus a hall-mark of western Orissa dance or rather Sambalpuri performing arts or nacha that has, over the years, gained an all-orissa popularity as a significant folk-dance of Orissa.



Tribal Performing Arts: Songs and Dances

Singing is older than speech. In singing the human being has always expressed has relatedness with his forces with the totality of life. In his speech he expressed his relationship to things. Song is the primeval communion of all, the ancient amicable-inimical closeness of nature whose pulse educated its rhythms. Speech is acquired separation.... Song is Magic.

Martin Buber, Introduction to *Kalevala*

Tribal songs are primarily meant to be sung. Their text, however, suggests and indicates a high level of oral poetry. That is why it is better to call them song-poems. These oral song poems range over a variety of subjects from love to death, from riddles to sanctified *mantras*, songs for social occasions as also for ritual purposes.

It is part of the complex of communal activity, which includes singing, dancing, religious celebration and celebration of social occasions. The songs, the dances and the relevant festivals are integrally linked. For celebrating each important religious festival or socio-religious ceremony , they have appropriate songs and dances.

The recognised performers remember the songs very well, particularly when they happen to be of the older generation. Most of the songs circulate by the process of oral transmission and their roots lie buried deep in the group-life of the tribes. There are no fixed songmakers and no attempt is made to take credit for having discovered or improvised a song.

The poems or songs often accompany the dances. The recitation of the words, the movement of the body and the ritual activity are the three co-ordinates of the total process. Curt

Sachs, the noted authority on primitive dance, has said that, for the primitive, dance was a means of gaining control over the surroundings. The endeavour to gain control over nature expressed itself through a psychological process of *sympathetic transcreation*. And that is a complex of bodily gestures, verbal symbolism and prescribed ritual action.

Their song-poems can be broadly classified into three groups. (a) those associated with festivals of the agricultural cycle from the sowing of seeds to harvesting of crops; the celebration of the coming of new flowers and leaves on trees in April; (b) those associated with life-crisis situations: birth, naming of a child, attainment of puberty, marriage, death, bone-drowning etc. and (c) those which are principally invocatory in nature meant to propitiate gods and goddesses: the *Meriah sloka*, the Santal *Bakhens*, the Saora invocation prior to the drawing of icons etc. This, however, should not be looked upon as a rigid classification as most of the agricultural festival songs are also in the nature of invocations to gods and goddesses Then, as a fourth group one can include a large group of love-songs of various types or even pure "entertainment" or "rejoicing" songs like the Santal '*lagnes*'

Some of the love songs are indeed exquisite for their lyrical grace and capacity to express pathos. Take, for example, this Kondh song : Why then did you leave ?



The dance in the grove is yet to end
The cock yet to crow;
Dancing to the tune
How gracefully you were floating along,
Sweet as a song;
And the jingling of your bangles

Had the soft melody of hailstones
Falling in the dark,
But in a moment,
What illusive mist or dark clouds,
What lunacy swallowed you ?
You quietly left.

Or the Juang marriage-song which is so delicately erotic

Your feet, they make
A tiny little arch;
Your waist thin as a banana tree,
Your belly a ghumra drum
Your breasts two flaps of a door.
We tie mango leaves on your hands;
Your ears are *siali* leaves
and the nose a nest for hornets
and the nostrils its two doors
And your eyes
They are stars in a dark night

And the Bondas who are so isolated on their hill-top are also capable of love-songs of great ecstasy and pathos :

The night seeks farewell,
Fields, trees, hills
Are now being disgorged
From Its dark womb.
The time for parting has come

I am so angry at this dawn,
Why could not it wait, sleep on a little more ?
Without you the home



Will not be a home;
Without you the village
Will not be a village
Our enemy the dawn has come.

II

The most fascinating aspect of tribal poems is their symbolism. Owen Barfield in his 'Poetic Diction' puts forward the interesting thesis that poetic diction is nothing but the primitive, undifferentiated state of language; when objects are identical with and non-distinct from the bundle of associations they give rise to. This is the key to the understanding of the nature of symbolism in tribal poetry and its basic difference from symbolism in modern poetry. Basically, symbolism in modern poetry is an attempt to look for the unfamiliar, the concrete and the strange in a world excessively devitalised by the drabness of familiarity and generalised abstractions. It tries to break the stranglehold of the referential, representational and discursive use of language in everyday use. The world we live in is not the symbolic world of the primitive. It is mapped out, connected, intelligible. A sense of wonder and awe is discounted. For the primitive, on the other hand, social communication is itself part of the vast symbolic milieu in which he swims as a fish where the strange and the unknown peer out of everything and language is a method of gaining some control and direction in such a world. In a sense the entire linguistic structure is symbol. This can be illustrated by any number of poems in this collection. For example



this Munda song :

The *mahul* tree
Full of branches and leaves
How it made, the paddy field look lovely ;
They are cutting away the mahul tree.
You five brothers, save it, save it.

Here the subject is not at all the mahul tree. It is the girl who has been given away in marriage. The village will look desolate when she is gone and 'they', are the members of the bridegroom's party. All this is never stated but always understood. Further, the brothers are not really expected to drive away the bridegroom's party. It is only a mock protest and a reference to the brother's role as the sister's defender in that society.

In an Oraon poem oranges are very cleverly used as sex symbols for a girl's breasts and the ripe, raw and half-ripe are described as being 'too sweet', 'too sour' and 'sweet-sour' respectively. This can be compared to Maikal Hill folk song:

He saw ripe lemons on her tree
How could he control his hunger

In another Oraon poem:

To a tree full of fruits
Come birds to peck
Crows, pigeons, doves,
And they chirp and frolic



The tree is the house of a man who has a number of marriageable daughters. The girls can also be sweet-smelling *mallika* flowers. The girls of village Diuri and Surmal are in a Munda dance

number, compared to *ludam* and *champak* flowers

How nicely they bend down
The *ludams* of Diuri
How sweetly they wave in the breeze
The *champaks* of Surmali
When moving in a line or running in a curve
What a necklace do they weave.

This kind of hidden symbolism in what is called the 'clue' poems, is quite common in Mundari and Oraon folk songs but not in Kondh or Paraja songs.

The following Munda poem makes an interesting use of sexual symbolism :

Red *alta* on your feet
Yellow turmeric on the palms
Which *alta* field did you enter
Whose turmeric field did you go to ?
Tell me truly, dear,
Did you enter a house of turmeric ?

In Munda and Oraon society red is often a symbol for life, energy and sex. The *sindur* or vermillion mark on the forehead and in the parting of the hair is a symbol of married life. Red



also stands for blood. Similarly, turmeric has associations with marriage and loss of virginity. Entering an *alta* field or a house of turmeric, therefore, suggests loss of virginity or sexual intercourse.

In the Munda poem the 'well' is a symbol for the girl's sex :

There is a well at the end of the village

Its brick walls shine and glitter

... ...

The bucket went down and down,
The poor girl how she wept
And wept.

The well in tribal society is very much of a social institution. It is the club for the village women where they come to fetch water and exchange the gossip of the day. The well is a trysting place for lovers. But it also is often used as a symbol of the female sex as in the earlier example. A Gond song upbraids a girl:

O little well, you give no water,
Your youth is past
Think well, your youth is ended

While a Dhanwar song says of a girl who comes of age:

She still
Looks like a parrot
But the well
Is full of water now?

According to C. M. Bowra:

.... in most modern symbolism a symbol may indeed embody much that is important to what it symbolises, but it is separate from it, as the Cross embodies many Christian associations but is not the same as Christianity. But primitive symbolism asserts a real identity. The well, and the womb, the roots of a tree and the male member, are treated if not as exactly identical, at least as different examples of a single thing which is both natural and supernatural and perfectly at home in the familiar works.



There are two other techniques of using

symbolism which need to be briefly mentioned here. In the first technique the comparision is put side by side with the statement of the song, as in the old Chinese poem quoted in translation by Arthur Waley in his Introduction to W.C. Archer's The Blue Grove :

The pelican stays on the bridge
It has not wetted its beak
That fine gentleman
Has not followed up his love-meeting.

This technique can be seen in the following Oraon poem:

When the paddy stalks are full of sap
The grains mature and ripen,
The pigeons come crowding.
I have a grown-up daughter,
And friends and relatives
Even from distant villages
Come crowding to my house.

In the second type the entire statement is through symbol, without any clue. It is only at the end of the poem that one or two lines occur that suggest what the symbol stands for. No parallelism is worked out, unlike in the first technique. In the following Mundari poem, until the dire consequences are mentioned, we do not suspect that the 'mad dark bees' are love-lorn young men :



The glistening white *mallika* flowers
Blossoming in your garden
Invite the mad dark bees;
When the flowers fade
And the aroma is no more

The bees will vanish;
If they are caught, send them
To the Keonjhar cutchery

While analysing the symbolic structure of tribal poems we will do well to remember the essential social purpose they serve. Since tribal society is much more of a symbolic milieu than ours is, there is no hiatus between poetic symbolism and social communication. Verrier Elwln rightly observed:

A symbol is the readiest cure for embarrassment and can smooth over a business transaction or a hitch in one's lovemaking with equal facility. So when emissaries go on the delicate business of arranging a girl's betrothal they do not state their purpose directly, but say they have come for merchandise, or to quench their thirst for water, or seek a gourd in which to put their seed. Similarly, the whole intricate absorbing business of daily love is carried on with symbols. Women by the well ask each other, "Did you have your supper last night ?" "Are you weary from yesterday's rice-husking ?" Men speak of digging up their fields, getting water from the well, entering a house. Not only the solicitation of the seducer but the domestic arrangements of wife and husband cannot be decently conducted without a verbal stratagem.

In comparing Oraon love songs to Baiga love songs Archer says that "If we define a love-poem as the expression of rapture, Baiga poems are as obviously love songs as Oraon poems are not". The Mundari, Kondh and Paraja love poems are real love poems in this sense. The Kondh love songs probe even deeper as in the example below :



Beloved, dear,

How fickle, how impatient you are
Only the flash of a face
A streak of lightning
In a moment you fade in the dark;
The distant firefly, coming near, no more.

A Paraja love song goes even deeper in its musings and sees love and death together:

You are eternal as death
The fear of death and your love
As intimate neighbours
They inhabit my dream
And so I play with life

or

You are the rain, the new bride
The raindrops are you
They fill me up.

or

How beautiful is the golden phasi
Down the bridge of your nose
Pining for that face
The brass string of my dung-dunga weeps
How sweetly it rings out the agony
The bare, naked voice of grief.



In many of these poems one can also notice a peculiar obsession with the passage of time. Time is not merely a sequence of seasons; or cycle of activities; it is also life and death, pain and pleasure. For example :

Asadh comes

And how she goes!
And where ?
Where does Time go ?
It comes—only to go ?

And time is also Death, its ceaseless watch on life to be captured :

And your back
Death watches you
From dawn to dusk
He keeps a watch on you.

The Kondh poem refers to the world as a dance-hall of men, a "dhobi-ghat", i.e., a place where washermen wash soiled clothes.

Life, for the Munda, Oraon, Kondh or Paraja, is not all dance and song. Dances and songs do punctuate their lives but tears lurk not very far behind those joyful faces. Different forms of anxiety obtrude. They are not merely economic or social. There are personal tragedies; love is not returned; a girl-friend or a wife deserts; naked and brutal reality threatens:

Speak no cruel words to me
My dear
How my heart pines for you.
Great is our misery
....
My parents have no money
To offer as kanyasuna.
As the bamboo tree dies
Swaying in the wind
The poor Paraja dies



Driven to grave by ceaseless labour.
The pumpkin plant's tragedy is from the day
Two leaves shoot forth from the seed;
Men pluck them out.
Man's tragedy is alike:
From childhood
Useless iron is thrown into corners
The poor man enters the forest
Crow-bar on the shoulders
Basket on the head
And life, only a tragic song.

But tragedy is often endured with a smile. It is sometimes even scoffed at. The primitive mind is very sensitive to the incongruous and the absurd. He can laugh at practically everything including himself. Here is an example:

The co-fathers-in-law come
Like a pair of bullocks
They have drunk at the hat
And come back together
Like a pair of bullocks.



The two drunken old men (father of the bride and of the bridegroom) walking like a pair of bullocks is certainly a hilarious subject.

Or this stubborn, outspoken refusal to marry:
Oil and turmeric
I will have none
Never on my body

And don't tie up flags
Of waving mango leaves
I will not marry the black girl
Of this wretched village
Do you hear friends?
Never shall I marry the black one

But at the end of all pain and misery there is thankfulness for the very fact of being alive. As in this Kondh song of an old man On the day of Pous Purnima festival:

The old hearts still beat
And we are alive
Here in this ancient village
Of dead ancestors
And so to-day we could partake
Of this great jubilation.

It is here that these tribal poems so much resemble Chinese poetry in their outlook and tone. Of Chinese literature, Arthur Waley said that it "excels in reflection rather than speculation". As in Chinese poetry, here one finds such a lot of creative delight in experience; such a lot of courage in accepting reality without any dramatisation, idealisation or rationalisation. In his introduction to 'Plucking the Rushes', an anthology of Chinese poetry, David Holbrook refers to this resignation, not despair; this transcendence of envy; the gratitude for the continuity of life and love in Chinese poetry that puts sufferings in the larger perspective of human existence set admist the indifference of the natural world. This is where it differs, he rightly holds,



from modern existentialism. These tribal poems reveal a similar attitude of mind which is aware of pain, in fact writhes in pain, but refuses to curse or run away into despair. Albert Camus once said that all great art extols and denies the world at the same time. The simultaneous celebration and rejection of the world by the simple primitives can perhaps have a lesson for us.

The invocatory songs of the Santals and the *Meria* song of the Kondhs are almost reminiscent of the Vedic rituals invoking prosperity and plenty for the community. For the tribals the supernatural world, the world of bongas of spirits and dead ancestors, is as real as the natural and social world he lives in. There is a benign or evil god in the neighbouring hill, the flowing stream at the outskirts of the village, the sacred grove and even the domestic kitchen. These gods take an intimate interest in human affairs and their blessings have to be invoked by appropriate propitiatory devices. Here poetry and ritual go hand in hand and serve an intimate and important social objective.

III

Most of the tribal communities have retained the rich and varied heritage of colourful dance developed over centuries and maintained by them, in a continuous tradition. To them, dances and songs are part of their life and sources of enjoyment and relaxation.



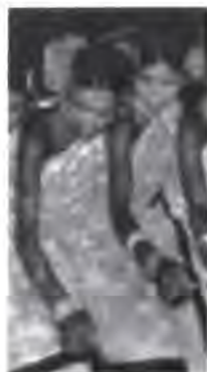
Although every tribe has its unique pattern of dance, there are several characteristic features which are common to all. Tribal dances are usually accompanied by songs and orchestra. Both men and women, young and old, dance but the

accompanying orchestra is usually provided by the male members. Invariably the dancers sing to the accompaniment of music. To them, dance and song are group activities forming integral parts of the celebration of religious festivals, wedding and funeral and occasionally for enjoyment and relaxation. Dance and song are named after the specific ceremony with which they are associated.

Tribal dance is characterised not only by its originality and spontaneity but also for its rhythmic movement of limbs, the free expression of emotion and colourful dancing costumes and attire. The theme of the song is considerably influenced by the natural phenomena of the environment and the subject matter of folklore and legends relating to the supernatural forces current among them.

The orchestra includes different types of musical instruments varying from one group of tribals to another, drums of diverse shapes and sizes, different types of string instruments, flute, and different varieties of gong and clapper are used. Many of these are manufactured by the members of the tribal societies. Some are also made by non-tribals and purchased from them.

Since dance and music have their roots in the religious and seasonal festivals observed by them; these are named after such occasions. Among several tribal communities specific dance and music can be performed only during the specific period prescribed for it. Some of the characteristic tribal dances of Orissa may be mentioned here.



The most celebrated Koya dance features a long row of girls with heavy ornaments and caps on their heads. They dance by striking a rhythm which

is produced by hitting the ground with sticks fitted with bells. They dance and sing forming a series of winding and unwinding circles to the tune of the music provided by the male members who put on the spectacular head-gear fitted with bison-horn with strings of cowries hanging in front. This is the tribe which uses the longest double membrane drums.

Among the Paraja, the most characteristic dance is known as 'Demsa'. Girls who put on typical short sarees and deck their heads with flowers form a long row by interlocking their arms. They move with typical swinging motion in a graceful formation. The girl who leads the dance holds a bunch of peacock feathers by which she gives direction about of their movements. The dance starts with a stylized walk in slow tempo ending in a fast moving climax. The music is provided by the male members.

The Gadaba dance does not differ much from that of the Paraja except in their dress and characteristic ornaments. The girls put on Keranga cloth and large coils of metal wares in their ear-lobes almost touching the shoulders and do up their unique hair-style. The music is again provided by the male members.

The Kondh girls in their special attire and inter-locking arms dance to the music played on by the male members. The movement of the group is sometimes forward and backward and on other occasions in coiling and uncoiling circles.



In case of the Saoras, persons belonging to all age groups irrespective of sex join the dance. The dancers hold sticks, umbrellas, axes and other similar objects and move forward and backward to the accompanying music.

Among the Bhuiyans and the Juangs of north Orissa, the popular dance is called Changu dance. Boys standing in a row sing and beat changu (a single membrane drum) and the girls interlocking their arms dance in front of them by moving forward and backward. The most striking feature of their dance is the musical sound produced by the girls by hitting their metal bangles against each other.

Among the Santals, both boys and girls dance with interlocking arms and in long rows. The most important features of their dances are the movements of feet, arms and the head. The Oraon dances too resemble the Santal dances. In both these cases the musical orchestra is provided by the male members.

While all the sixty two tribal groups of Orissa have their own distinct dance-forms and songs and their own musical instruments, most of them share a number of common features.

Singing and dancing for them are not items of luxury. It is part of daily living, as natural and as unpretentious. It is also participative and communal. The whole village would sometime participate in a performance. The circle of dancers would go on extending — from grandmother to granddaughter; holding each others' hand, singing and dancing together. The onlookers, the audience, are not these who have come only to watch; they are participants, intensely involved.

Mention may be specially made of the songs and dance of the kondhs and Paraja of south Orissa and the Santals and Juangs of north Orissa. Kondhs and Parajas have their "Pus Parab" dances and dances celebrating special occasions like festivals and marriage. The dance hall is the open arena in the village street - the akhra. The



Dhangdas and Dhangdis would emerge from their community homes and the village street akhra would reverberate with their songs and dances. The singing and dancing are eternal like the hills and the moonlit nights. In the first decade of last century a Britisher had noted about the excellence of jhodia Paraja dances which is valid even after the passing of a century. Mr. W. Francis wrote in the Gazetteer of Vizagapatanam district (Madras 1907) that the dance is extremely vigorous and elegant. The Paraja



girls are fine dancers and their foot and body movements have delicate nuances. "Picturesque in the extreme is a dancing party of these cheery maidens, dressed all exactly alike, great rings on their fingers, brass bells on their toes; their substantial but shapely arms and legs tattooed from wrist to shoulder, and from ankle to knee. The orchestra, which consists solely of drums of assorted shapes and sizes, dashes into an overture and the girls quickly group themselves into a couple of *Corps de ballet*, each under the leadership of a premiere danseuse, who marks the time with a long baton of peacock's feathers. Suddenly the drums drop to a muffled beat, and each group strings out into a long line, headed by the leader, each maiden passing her righthand behind the next girl's back, and grasping the left elbow of the next but one. Thus linked, the long chain of girls, keeping time with the drums... weave themselves into sinuous lines, curves, spirals, figures of eight and back into lines again; wind in and out like some brightly coloured snake; never halting for a moment, now backwards, now forwards, first slowly and decorously and then, as the drum quickens, faster and faster, with more and more abandon...". This long quote is because it so vividly describes this very charming dance in 1907 ! In fact Parajas are undoubtedly the best dancers among the tribal groups of Orissa.

Equally remarkable are the songs and dances of the Santals and the Juangs. The Santal Sarhul (Spring) festival's dances and the Dasain dances (celebrated dancing Dusserah) have to be seen for their exuberance of spirit, vigour and elegance. The Santals are a very large community and in fact, along with the Gonds and Bhils, are one of the three largest tribal groups of India. The Juangs of Keonjhar are a comparatively smaller community. Unlike Santals who are highly accultured, they are

withdrawn, shy and reclusive. But their changu dance is deservedly very popular. The music coming out of the beating of a changu is exquisite and captivating. A Juang village has a community home called *manda ghara*. This is where villagers gather in the evening, where outside guests are received and on its walls one can see a number of changus hanging. There would also be a huge log-fire on the floor continuously smouldering and kept burning.

The changu dance is very popular and the whole village would participate in the dace and the singing in front of the *manda ghara*. The Bhuyans of Pallahara also have similar changu dance which is very popular with them.

Danda Nacha, Sahijatra, Ghoomra, Daskathia And Dhanu Jatra: The other Folk Performances

Danda Nacha

It is a folk form of dance structured around a religious ritual. Shiva and his consort Parvati as Kalika or Kali are the presiding deities of the ritualised dance. In fact, the performance appears to be a folk form to depict the various facets of Shiva tandav.

Did the name emerge out of Danda which in the local language literally means punishment? Many believe it did. The devotees do inflict a self-imposed punishment on themselves which takes many forms varying from region to region and community to community. The forms it takes are variously designated as *Jhamu Jatra, Patua Jatra, Uda Parab, Kanta Parab, Jhula Parab* etc. These variations all involve some form of ritual worshipping of Shiva and his consort. The performers are similarly called by various names as *dandua, bhokta, or just bhakta*. Sometimes someone wishes the infliction of such danda and participate in the relevant ritual for achieving a desire as a form of wish-fulfilment. *Pana Samkranti* or *Vishuva Samkranti* coming in mid-April, is the final day of the celebration and end of the ritual. It begins for the *bhokta* and *dandua*-s eleven days before in the shape of observing several austerities and devotional worships, fasting, prayer, etc. Some also believe that name Danda is derived from danda or a pole or stick which the *Dandua*-s hold. Scholars feel that the prevalence of this form among the disadvantaged - the untouchables or the low castes – perhaps indicates that it emerged during the decline of Buddhism in Indian society. It took in its fold the disadvantaged sections of society who had suffered from the



Danda Nacha



neglect and sneer of the Brahminical and other superior caste people.

This form of folk performance and ritual is found mostly in Western and Northern Orissa both among the tribals and the non-tribals. The tribals of Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh, Sambalpur, Kalahandi districts perform *Jhula* or hook-swinging in which a person swings along a fixed pole hanging parallel to the ground hooked to a rotating parallel pole. The hooking is generally on the back of the person which hundreds watch down below. Varitations of it are walking on burning embers of a fire in pits (Nian Parab) or on thorns spread all over the pit (Kanta Parab). Each one is also called as pata i.e. as *Nian pata, Kanta pata, Uda pata, Jhula pata* etc. substituting parab by pata. The dance portion of the ritual either follows or precedes the ritual. In that the *bhoktas* dance holding *masals* of fire on which they sprinkle *Jhuna* (raisin) The fire leaps up each time Jhuna is sprinkled emitting some smoke and in the glaze the fierce dancers resemble Shiva and his tandav. In Mayurbhanj, the important folk form of dance Chhau is also prefaced by such bhokta dance. Chhau incidentally also comes at the time of Vishuva Samkranti. The emphasis in all these forms is one form of *danda* or punishment, inflicted on the body to please the divine. It is observed both by tribal and non-tribal people and is variously known in various parts of Orissa and in fact has its parallel in the two neighbouring states, West Bengal and Bihar.

April, when this festival is held, is also the time when the forests are in blossom with new leaves and flowers. The Sal, the Mahul have flowers and Kusum, Asan etc have brilliant red or copper-coloured new leaves. The red leaves and flowers actually seem to



put the forests on fire. It is the time for celebrating the coming of spring, of the new flowers and leaves and invoke the blessings of not only Shiva but also other gods and goddesses of the Hindu and tribal pantheon.

As mentioned earlier, Shiva and Parvati happen to be the main divinities worshipped and propitiated during Danda Nacha. Holding blazing masals the bhoktas or *Danduasis* (also called *Danduas*) come in procession. In Chhau dance during the Chaitra Parva they come on the stage and dance in the midst of raging flame and smoke invoking Shiva and Parvati as Kalika or the Dark Lady. The musical instruments accompanying the dance are *dhol* (percussion), *mahuri* (wind instrument) and *dhudki* (a stringed instrument). The men-folk (no women participate in it) wear *pugree* or an elaborate *bandhani* on the head, with twigs and leaves tucked at the waistband and cowrie necklaces, bracelets, armlets and *nupur* at the ankles. The *nupurs* jingle as they dance holding some form of a trap-like circle as a form of obeisance to Shiva. Quite often too Danda is also accompanied by *Sabara-saburuni, Kela-keluni, Chadheya-chadheyani* pairs with occasional joking dialogues. There are occasions when at the end of the Dandanata the crowd is entertained to a regular *Suanga* which is another folk form of jatra or opera.

Technically, only the *bhokta* dancing to worship Shiva and Parvati and holding a 'phasa' or a pole and dressed on the lines mentioned above is called Danda nacha (nata). Parallel streams are Chhau, and Patua. Chhau is discussed as a major folk form elsewhere. Brief mention may be made of *patua*-s. They are of several forms such as *Ghanta Patua, Ghata Patua, Uda Patua, Jhula Patua, Man Patua, Kanta Patua, Tira Patua* etc. All of them involve



physical austerities, fastings and worship prior to the act in order to please gods and solicit their blessings. Thousands watch these performances, some of which are often combined at one show sequentially as in sports events with different performers. All these also come in April a little before Bisuva or Pana Samkranti and ending on that day.

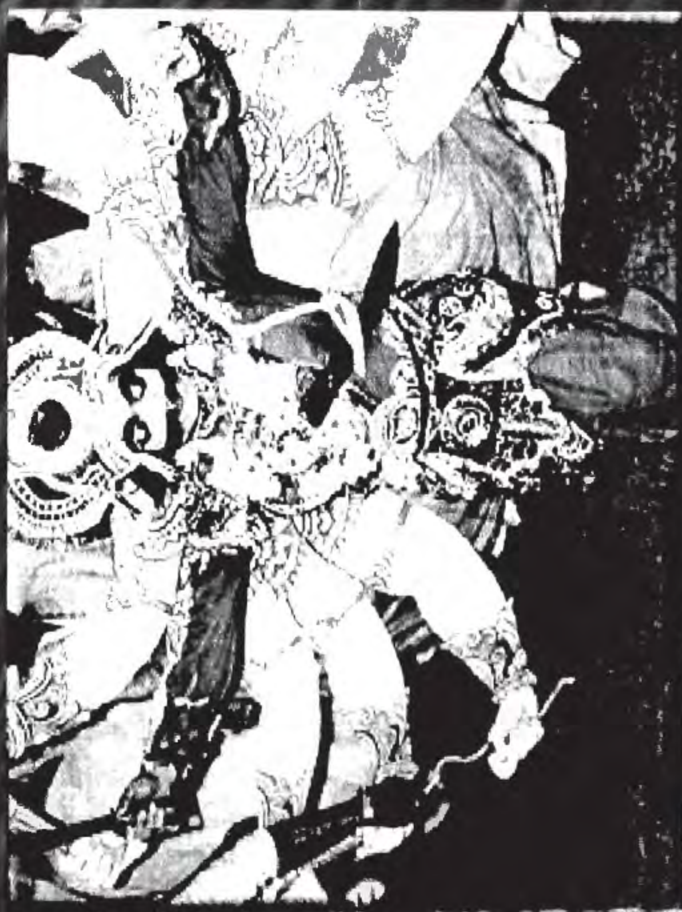
The various forms are designated by an appropriate name. *Nian Pata* is walking on fire or glowing charcoal and any performer who performs a *pata* is a *patua*. Similarly *Uda Pata* is hook-swinging from poles, *Kanta Pata* walking on throns, *Tira Pata* sleeping on sharp pointed swords. Only the *ghanta* and *ghata* patuas are very different. In it, the worshippers dress up as women with coloured *ghagra* and blouse. They put a wooden *baithaki* on the head on which rests an elaborately decorated water-filled pitcher. The pitcher is adorned with flowers, *dhua*, and sandal paste. Vermillion and turmeric are also applied to it. The *baithaki* is a stylised one and not a mere wooden structure resting on the Patua's head. The Patuas move from village to village with the eleborate "goddess" on their head (and the pitcher is treated as Devi Sarala, a local goddess who is worshipped in coastal Orissa districts and is known all over for curing ailments and conferring blessings. The Sarala temple is a major place of worship and scholars have worked and produced doctoral dissertations on her worship and her place in Orissa's mother-goddess pantheon. The gongs (ghanta) are sounded as they move from village to village and bless people by touching the pitcher to their heads, and distributing the sanctified water from the pitcher which symbolises the goddess. Apart from Sarala of Jhankad, Mangala of Kakatpur, Churchika of Banki and Bhagavati of



Banapur are the other temples from where ghanta patuas also move to surrounding villages bare-footed.

Sahi Jatra

Sahi Jatra is a form of folk-theatre that is specific to Puri. Its origin is traced to the later part of the Ganga dynasty. It was during this time that Orissa faced repeated attacks from outside forces. This attack was aimed as much at territorial conquests as to take over the Jagannath Temple which symbolised Hinduism in Eastern India. Jagannath culture was the essence of Orissa's societal and religious belief. It appears that with a view to make the local people conscious of the developing crisis, Kapilendra Dev, the first king of the Suryavansha (solar dynasty) wanted to build up and strengthen the local resistance at Puri and to energise local people in this task. There used to be seven important *sahi*-s at that time in the township of Puri surrounding Jagannath Temple. A *Sahi* is a small neighbourhood which is integrated in social and familial terms. Chodoganga Dev, the Ganga King had assigned several functions and responsibilities to these seven sahis in matters of temple worship and rituals. When there was the fear of foreign invasion, these *sahi*-s seem to have been asked to organise akharas where physical exercises and different forms of martial art were practised. Along with it song, dance and religious discourses were also often held bringing out the grandeur of Lord Jagannath. The *sahi*-s thus acquired a role in not only maintaining law and order at the time of the various ever-recurring temple rituals and celebrations but also in organising themselves into a second line of defence in the event of external aggression. According to another view this is a



Sahi Jatra

symbolic presentation of the mighty imperial tradition as it existed during the halcyon days of the Gangas when their empire stretched from the Ganga to Kaveri. This was also the time they were valiantly fighting against Muslim incursions.

Sahi Jatra is celebrated from the day of Rama Navami (Rama's birthday) till his *abhisheka* or coronation. In ancient records there is mention of the existence of four *kotas*, four *garujas* and seven *akhraghar* or *sahis*. The *Jagaghars* in different sahis were also referred to as *melas*. They are perhaps the same as the *akhraghars* where physical exercise and martial arts are practised even today. That training and performance as entertainment in which all participate seem to have developed together. Rama-Ravana, Hanuman-Parshuram, Naga dance etc. are now part of the function. The procession is long and elaborated. Sometimes they come in four formations leaving aside the Naga dancer who enjoys a special privilege of slow motion and slow dance (in fact, fast movement and fast rhythm in dance is impossible given his heavy dress). The *Sanyasi* group wielding swords demonstrate their proficiency in sword-fighting and sword manipulation. The *Nijham* group demonstrate capacity for weight-lifting. The third, referred to as *Banapata* consists of experts demonstrating stick-play and knife-play to the accompaniment of *dholak* and *chacheri* music. Then there is the Sathera group who demonstrate their expertise in war to the accompaniment of war-drums beating.

The most important part of the Sahi institution is the annual sahi jatra. This can be treated as a processional form of folk theatre. This is performed at the advent of spring and is generally for three days. The main character of the performance is the *Naga Saja* which is considered to be exotic manifestation of Lord



Jagannath. The protagonist has heroic features and is elaborately decorated wearing a papier-mache crown. This crown is sometime decorated with paddystalk, peacock feathers and flowers. The protagonist wears a very elaborate dress with a tiger skin around his chest and anklets with bark of trees. At his waist, he supports a bow-shaped grouping of 20 ornaments. In fact, he wears a heavy load of weapons and ancillary things such as (1) a shield made of rhino hide, (2) a gun, (3) a horn used as a whistle, (4) a sword, (5) a khukri, (6) bow and arrows, (7) tiger-skin, (8) bell, (9) yet another iron shield and finally, (10) a toiletry-box. It is easy to see that it is a very heavy load for one person. The bow has the face of a tiger and looks quite fearsome with vermillion smeared on its forehead. The protagonist wears an artificial beard and moustache. He looks a massive presence with the visible portions of his body smeared with yellow colours and generally moves slowly. But sometimes he breaks into a dance to the rhythmic beat of drums. No songs accompany the dance. In the procession often we see characters like *Kela, Keluni* or *Sabar, Sabaruni* or *Budha, Budhi* etc. *Kela Keluni* are two huge decorated masks of unusual busts and carried on the head by putting in the hollow inside. The actors get inside the huge masks and manipulate it into various poses. Similarly, Sabar Sabaruni as a tribal couple are real persons dressed in a stylised manner and they enact sequences from tribal life.

The procession also includes bull fighting with huge hollow figures of bulls inside which the actors manipulate various movements representing the backward and forward movement of fearsome bulls as they fight.



It provides entertainment to the people of the town who participate in very large number in the elaborate procession.

Several inter-related plays are also enacted around the *Naga Saja*. These include themes taken from the Ramayana, the Mahabharat, the puranas as well as local folk stories with characters of Ravana, Hiranyakashipu, Kaliya snake and Brutrasura. The folk and mythical elements sometimes get inter-mixed and in every enactment, as the procession moves, there is *bonhomie* and a happy carnival-like atmosphere.

There is no authentic documentation to show how the Sahi jatra evolved over the years. Anargyarahava, a Sanskrit play composed in 19th century by one Sri Murari Mishra perhaps makes the first reference to the Sahi Jatra.

A *Naga Saja* could be associated with Lord Jagannath's *Nagarjuna Vesha*. The jatra is held on the birthday of Narsimha, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu. Sometimes a number of sub plots are enacted and the musical instruments that accompany are *dholak, changu, ghanta, ghanti, nagara* and *mahuri*. The most important part of this theatre of procession is that audience participation is automatic and spontaneous. In fact, the audience sometimes participates by singing and dancing along with professional actors. The spontaneous participation of the general public is what makes the sahi jatra a very unique performance. The songs that accompany are endowed with a local flavour and sometime borrowed from ancient *Puranas*. Different *Sahis* perform the jatra on different days but sometimes they also join and make it a combined performance. The Sahi Jatra is indeed a unique form of folk theatre found only in Puri of Orissa.



Ghoomra Dance

Historical evidence points to the antiquity of this dance form. It finds mention in the Oriya epics, Mahabhrata and Ramayana. In the 13th century Konark temple's is Natamandap or Dance Hall there is a dancer very much resembling a ghoomra dancer. He is dancing in a slightly front-leaning position. Ghoomra is a specialised kind of medium-sized drum, an earthen pitcher with an elongated stem, its mouth covered generally by a reptile skin. When this tight skin is beaten by the palm in a rhythmic manner it produces a resounding bass sound reverberating in the enclosed empty space.

The mainstay of this dance form is the drum. This dance-form is extremely popular in the western tribal district of Kalahandi and also in the neighbouring districts of Bolangir and Sambalpur. This is the main variety of Ghoomra of which there are two other ancillary, slightly different forms. One of these two is prevalent in the hilly areas of Pallahara in Angul district. In this form only the positioning of the drum is different. The dancers place them on the left side of the waist and not in the front line of the waist. The women dance facing the drummers in a line formation. Both the groups synchronise their movements harmoniously. The singing is done by the women. The themes vary from objects of nature to the celebration of love and social relationship. There is no specific occasion for the performance. It is danced on various festive occasions, unlike the Kalahandi form which begins rather ceremonially two weeks before Gamha Poornima (full moon of





Ghoomra Dance

the month in September) and ends on the day of Poornima.

It is also danced during three major festivals, namely, Dusserah, Pous Purnima and Nua Khai. The first one is an all Orissa festival and is also celebrated in neighbouring Bengal. The second one is primarily a tribal festival while the last one is celebrated with much grandeur in the western Orissa. Literally it means the "eating of new (rice)".

The Kalahandi form of the dance is fairly elaborate. Singing and drum-beating punctuate each other. The songs are generally *Chhandas, Chaupadis*, prayer songs and various folk songs. When a couplet is song the drums remain silent and then follow up with intense beating along with vigorous dancing. Generally, one player remains at the centre of the performance with a small-sized kettle drum called Nisan which is beaten with two leather sticks. It is this 'central' drummer who is really the conductor of the show.

The Kalahandi form has also its stylised costume, the main elements of which are tightfitting coloured dhotis, jackets, colourful turbans fitted with peacock feathers, that 'dance' with the same rhythm as the main dance item.

A third and somewhat less known form of the dance is noticed among the *Saura* community in coastal Orissa. This form uses bigger drums which, because of their size and weight, cannot be hung around the waist and are, instead, placed on the ground and played by the drammer sitting on a slightly raised pedestal. This is also almost exclusively danced in marriage festivals placing the groom and the bride at the centre of the dancing circle.



The Kalahandi form seeks to relate the dance

to the war-drum of Ravana's son Meghanada (literally it means the rumbling of thunder) who had defeated Indra. This is perhaps the reason way in Kalahandi it is never performed during the rainy season, the season whose presiding deity is Indra.

Daskathia

Somewhat resembling pala, this is the most popular item and form of ballad-singing in Orissa. It is limited to only two performers - the main singer and his palia (technically the one who catches on or repeats the original). As in Pala here too the palia makes the performance extremely interesting and lively by his various intrusions with wit, humour, and mock challenges to the main singer. The Palia provides the comic relief and a facade for the progress of the main narrative that uses themes taken primarily from the two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Palia's banters and humorous interludes makes the performance lively as hundreds of village-folk witness the performance with rapt attention and emotive participation. The performance's main emphasis in on singing and only slightly on the foot and body movements of both the main singer and his palia.

The composition of the songs generally follow the meter popularly known as *Chhandas*, *Chaupadis* and *Chautisas*. They are highly traditional tunes and give the ballad-singing Daskathia form its distinct identity. Apart from the two epics the compositions used are from the medieval poets of Orissa.



A pair of castanets or wooden clappers are played rhythmically as the accompaniment to the singing.

They are called Daskathi or Ramtali. The clappers have a bunch of small ankle bells which jingle while the clappers are sounded. The two clappers are held in an intricate manner in the left hand while it is played by the right hand. The dexterity which is very demanding comes from regular practice. This author has seen very experienced main singers who play even two pairs of clappers with ease and



unmatched skill. The recurring sequences of prose-dialogue between the two and the main singer's singing makes it a very interesting form.

Daskathia is associated with Ganjam, the southern district of Orissa. Coincidentally, most of Orissa's celebrated medieval poets were also from this district. Their religious and love lyrics are deservedly rare treasures of Oriya literature. The Daskathia singer performs the role of a folk continuation of this great school of medieval lyric poetry. Gayakaratna Baidyanath Sharma was the most celebrated performer of this form of balled singing and had gained recognition for soulful renderings in his inimitable style.

Dhanu Jatra

Among the numerous festivals of Orissa, Dhanu Jatra which is observed at Baragada in Western Orissa occupies a pride of place. Baragada is around 59 kms. from Sambalpur and is on the National Highway No.6 connecting Calcutta and Mumbai. The Dhanu Jatra ceremony begins 11 days before *Pous Purnima* and ends on the day of the Purnima (day of the full moon). The month of *Pous* comes in December/January of the English calendar. This Jatra has been held over the years for centuries and, at least for the last 50 years, in a very organised form. In fact, the Golden Jubilee of Dhanu Jatra was observed during 1998. Dhanu Jatra, which literary means the Jatra with the Bow is the theatrical presentation of Krishna Lila. The entire myth of Krishna and Kansha as described in the scripture is enacted during these 11 days, beginning with Devaki's marriage with Vasudeva and ending with the death of Kansha.

Somehow the geography of Baragada municipal area answers to the locales of the Puranic description of Gopa and Mathura. The town is treated as Mathura, the capital of King Kansha. By its side flows the river Jeera which is treated as Yamuna. A village Ambapali on the other bank of the river with dense grove of various trees is treated as Gopa. A mango grove of the village is designated as Vrindaban and a fairly large pond as Lake Kalindi. A gorgeously-decorated elevated platform is raised in the centre of the town to be the Durbar of King Kansha. The entire township with its suburbs is treated as the extended stage for the Dhanu Jatra. That way it is perhaps the largest open air theatre anywhere in the world. In addition to locations narrated earlier many





Kansha Dhanu Jatra

other spots are used for different institutions/places mentioned in the Krishna Lila theme.

The unique feature of Dhanu Jatra is the very large number of characters participating and also the active participation of the people. The lead characters such as Krishna, Kansha, etc. are selected from among the artists of the place who are more professional. But the general public participates in various scenarios physically as in Krishna's Durbar or as cowherd boys of Vrindaban or Gopa. In fact, it is people's theatre in a true sense. This author was once the Sub-Collector of Baragada and cherishes the wonderful memory of the festival and the vibrant and happy spirit in evidence during the entire period . No specific dialogue for any scene is laid out. Instead, the characters deliver the dialogues extempore. The scenes are enacted normally in the late afternoons and evenings. The festival does not interfere in the routine of the township which goes on as usual.

The performances begin with the marriage of Devaki, the only sister of the demon-king Kansha with Vasudeva. The demon king imprisons both Devaki and Vasudeva when he hears the prophecy of his own death at the hands of their offspring. Krishna, their eighth child is surreptitiously taken away at birth to Nanda's house and grows up in Gopapura with his cowherd boy friends. There is mock Kaliya Dalan and the killing of several demons who are sent by Kansha to kill Krishna. Finally at the invitation of Kansha, Krishna travels to Mathura. He travels in a beautifully decorated chariot and reaches the Durbar of his uncle King Kansha.



The Dhanu Jatra is actually the festival of the Bow of Lord Shiva. Kansha invites *yogi*-s and *rishi*-s along with Krishna and Balaram for this festival. It is Akrura who brings Krishna from Gopa in his

Krishna, Balarama in Dhanu Yatra



chariot, Kansa is unable to face the countenance of Krishna which is supposed to blaze like myriad suns. Swearing at Krishna from his lofty gallery or *mancha*, Kansha falls down and dies. The various themes such as the marriage of Devaki and Vasudeva, birth of Krishna, his Lila in Gopapura, the rasa lila, the killings of different demons sent to Gopa by Kansha, Krishna's redemption of Kubja, the killing of Chanura and Mustika, the breaking of the Bow and finally the death of Kansha- all these are enacted at suitable sites on the various parts of the city and on the other side of the river, the village Ambapali. This kind of spreading of the stage into a vast arena of the town and its outskirts is indeed unique. Luckily, the village Ambapali and its forest and mango groves also give a general impression of the mythical Gopapura on the other bank of the river. For different occasions, the songs that are used are picked up from different classical texts and their rendering is extremely popular. A few folk songs are also liberally used during the performances. There is evidence to show that before 1948, Dhanu Jatra was held in various other parts of Baragada Sub-Division including the town. For the audience, it is a direct participation in the theme of the Dhanu Jatra festival. King Kansha travels through different parts of his kingdom which is the spread-out town. With passage of time, the Dhanu Jatra has more themes and the performances are better organised and better co-ordinated. The number of visitors from outside is no doubt becoming larger every year. The local trade and business and the masses voluntarily donate for the success of this festival. Thus, in the years to come, it is certain that the festival will change in several ways but the grand spectacle of using a vast area of an entire town, a river and a village on the other bank of the river as an extended stage is indeed unique and will remain unchanged and fascinatingly grand.



Dhanu Jatra





Tribal dance

Bakhens: The Ritual invocation Songs of the Santals

A Preliminary Statement

Introduction

Most primitive cultures reveal a curious and passionate interest in the supernatural. The world of the supernatural is inhabited by gods and goddesses, both benevolent and malevolent. They are also peopled by the spirits of dead ancestors, who continue to retain an interest in and a concern for the community and the village they have left behind. This supernatural world of the gods and spirits of dead ancestors and the souls of the village elders is always in an intimate, yet ambivalent, love-hate relationship with the world of the living. The blessings of the spirits are invoked by the community for personal and communal welfare: for rich harvests, peace and plenty, for cows which will yield milk in abundance, for smiling crops which will not be destroyed by pests. They are also invoked to ensure that the village will not be visited by epidemics. The list of objectives which are sought to be achieved through such prayers can be extended. The blessings of the benevolent gods and the dead ancestors are, however, invoked generally for the welfare of the community and only in a limited way, for personal welfare. In addition to the two types of gods and spirits referred to above, sometimes there is also a third type. The lesser gods, who are generally malevolent and who reside in forests, trees, hills etc., have also to be invoked. The primitive is still very much in the lap of nature and natural phenomena still inspire in him a sense of wonder, awe and reverence. The hill at the foot of which the village nestles is a presence. So is the forest and the *jhola* or the

hill-stream rustling along on its bed of stones and pebbles. The vulnerable village is protected by the boundary god from the evil eye and from the wrath of hostile gods and spirits. The village and the village-community sometimes invites this wrath without direct knowledge. Often the evil spirits or *bonga*-s are spiteful and malicious. The wrath may not even have been incurred by any act.

In all primitive cultures there is a concern for the community reflected in the invocations or the incantatory songs meant for the gods and the spirits. The Upanishads have a large number of invocatory songs which seek to propitiate the gods for the prosperity and wellbeing of man in society. One of the songs prays for long life, luxuriant crops, thousands of heads of cattle, sons and daughters, grand-sons and grand-daughters. It also says:

May He protect us both !
May He nourish us both !
May we both work together with great energy !
May our study be thorough and fruitful !
May we never hate each other !

The Santals have a very elaborate system of invoking the blessings of the gods and spirits. Their invocation songs bear the distinctive mark of their culture. As a matter of fact, the Santal tribe's search for the Great Tradition is inextricably linked



in their minds with the antiquity and the sanctity of their ritual invocations. From 1976 to 1977, this author, as a Homi Bhabha Fellow, had the privilege of working among the Santals and studying different aspects of their culture as part of his project,"

Technology and Ritual: The Search for a New Identity among the Primitive Communities". During this period he had an opportunity to participate in the singing of the invocation songs during actual performances. He is grateful to the Santal priests who permitted him to join in these religious ceremonies. Separately, this author has edited these invocation songs in a book entitled *Bakhen: Ritual Invocation Songs of a Primitive Community.* In that book the original songs have been given in the Roman script with diacritical marks according to standard international phonetic practice.

The invocation songs of the Santals have the generic name of *Bakhen*. They are sixteen in number. The texts of the songs have remained more or less unaltered over the centuries. The Santals have now a script which was 'invented' by Pandit Raghunath Murmu, their *Guru gomke* (the great spiritual leader). In this chapter, four *Bakhen*-s have been presented in the Santali language, and in the Oriya script. The latter is used as the medium of writing by most educated Santals even when they write in the Santali language. For those who do not know the Oriya script, this is followed by a transliteration in the Roman script, with diacritical marks so that the tunes can be read in their original pattern. An approximate literal meaning of the songs has been given at the end. Along with the two songs in Oriya script, their Roman transliteration and English rendering, it was also felt that the musical notations of the relevant songs ought to be included. The songs are, however, more in the manner of inspired incantations or recitations and not singing per se. Scholars of music and musicologists, like Pandit Damodar Hota, Sri Balakrushna Das and Dr. Sunil Satpathy worked with this author trying to render these Invocation songs into musical notations.



Finally it was decided not to include notations in the book referred to above since it was not regular musical notations to which these songs were susceptible. Besides, it was unlikely that the notations would add to the appreciation of the *Bakhen-s* in a book whose primary purpose was to analyse them from the literary and anthropological point of view. However, an approximate rendering of these four Invocation songs through a system of graphs has been prepared by Dr. Satpathy with a technical note explaining them. It is hoped that this will, to a limited extent, help in an appreciation of these peculiar song-structures, and perhaps arouse greater interest among scholars and musicologists in this aspect of our musical tradition.

It may be of interest to mention in this context that the author had the privilege of chairing the session on *The Ethnography of Invocations and Incantations– Verbal Symbolisms and Ritual Structures* at the Tenth International Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists held in Delhi in December, 1978. This session took account of such invocation songs in a cross-cultural perspective and sought to analyse them from the twin viewpoints of the ritual structures on which they are built and the nature of the verbal symbolism and metaphors in which they are found. Dr. Satpathy had referred to the difficulties of rendering such chantings into musical notations and symbols and discussed the final result that had been achieved



in the process of rendering two of the Invocation songs into such notation. Not much work has been done so far in the field of analysing and interpreting tribal music from the point of view of modern musicology. This author, for example, has so far edited

Santhal Invocation songs

The santal invocation songs are 16 in number. They are:

1.	Magh Bonga	Invocation to *Jaher Era* and others at the time of the *Magh* Festival
2.	Baha Bonga	Invocation to *Jaher Era* and others at the time of the *Baha* or the Flower Festival
3.	Erok Sim Bonga	Invocation to *Jaher Era* and others at the time of the Sowing Festival
4.	Sura Sagen Mahmane	Festival for the new seedlings that have just sprouted. Invocation to *Jaher Era* and others
5.	Asadia Bonga	Weeding Festival
6.	Nawa Hulu Rakab Bonga	Festival for new crops
7.	Jantal Bonga	Festival for worship of the *Buru Bonga.* Invocation to the Hill-God
8.	Sohrae Got Bonga	Festival for the worship of *Jaher Era* during *Sohrae*
9.	Sohrae Gola Bonga	Cattle-shed worship during the *Sohrae* Festival. Invocation to Gola Bonga or the God of the Cattle-shed
10.	Giditara	Invocation to the God of the Cattle-shed at the time of the offerings made during the *Sohrae* Festival.
11.	Caco-Catiar Nimdah	Invocation to *Maranburu* for the newborn
12.	Bapla Handi Bonga	Invocation to *Maranburu* at the time of .the marriage, just before *Itut-sindur,* application of vermilion
13.	Parah Karenah Handi Bonga	Invocation to *Maranburu* at the time of worshipping *handia*
14.	Pelaka-ah Handi Bonga	Invocation to Maranburu at the time of worshipping handia, brought by relatives from other villages
15.	Kuli Bida	Invocation to Maranburu while offering handia at the time of bidding farewell to the bride
16.	Nahan and Bhandan	Invocation to dead ancestors at the time of the bone-drowning ceremony

four anthologies of the songs of the tribals of Orissa. These songs were put on tape during performances and later transcribed and translated. It is hoped that at a future date the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and the State Akademi will be able to publish these songs, along with the relevant musical notation, and analyse them from the point of view of ethno-musicology. As a matter of fact, ethno-poetics and ethno-musicology are comparatively new sciences in India. Even in the west, ethno-poetics is a comparatively new discipline and it is only in the last decade or so that it has made some headway. Mention may be made in this connection of the symposium on ethno-poetics held at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in April, 1975; it was perhaps the first international effort at approaching the subject with a fair degree of systematisation.

These invocation songs can be broadly categorised into two groups. The first group (Nos. 1 to 10) relate to different stages in the agricultural cycle and the rituals relevant to each such agricultural or allied activity. Magh Bonga is not strictly an agricultural festival. But it is related to the seasonal cycle, when Santals build new houses or repair their existing houses, and for this purpose they enter the forest to collect timber, forest products, grass etc. According to the Santals, the new year begins from this festival and, therefore, it is one of their more important festivals. Similarly, the three invocations during the Sohrae festival (Nos. 8, 9 & 10) are related to agriculture since worshipping the cattle and the cattle-shed is a very important part of agricultural activity.



The other group of Invocation songs (Nos. 11 to

16) relates to the festivals of birth, marriage and death. Each of the ritual Invocations can again be considered from the following six points of view:

1. The manner of determination of the occasion or exact day of worship.
2. The place of worship.
3. The persons who conduct the worship and the others who participate.
4. Ritual articles used in the worship either as offerings to the gods or as ancillary objects.
5. The gods or *bonga*-s who are worshipped.
6. The significance of the worship.

The date for the festivals and, therefore, for the corresponding ritual celebrations is determined by the village headman or *manjhi*. He has the traditional right to determine the date and time for each such occasion. *Magh Bonga* and *Baha Bonga* are always celebrated at the place for communal worship, the *Jahera*. The *Jahera* symbolises the remnants of the original village forest, the sacred grove where most of the communal worship takes place. Within the *Jahera*, three sal trees are dedicated to *Maranburu* (the great mountain), *Jaher Era* (the lady of the grove) and Marietta Turuiko. In addition to these three, *Dharam Deuta*, *Gramdevi* and *Sima Sale Bonga* are also located within the *Jaher Era*. Besides, sometimes the *Manjhi Halam*, the bonga of the village manjhi or headman, and the *Paragana bonga*, the spirit of the original chief, are also located in this *Jahera*. Unlike these two important ritual invocations, all the invocation songs relating to birth and marriage and



the *Sohrae* are celebrated in each individual household, the cattle-shed or the place on the outskirts of the village where all the village cattle are gathered.

The invocations are sacred and like all sacred literature there are certain restrictions regarding their singing and the persons who sing them. The village priest or the *naike* alone is authorised to chant the invocations relating to *Magh* and *Baha Bonga* ceremonies. The system of village priesthood is hereditary in character. While the text of the songs is common and undergoes only minor spatial variation, each priest has a few prefatory words that invariably begin the recitation or incantation. These vary from village to village. Each village priest has his own special prefatory line. This core or intimate line is the heart of the incantation. It is no doubt a technical line but it is zealously guarded as a secret and even the *naike* transmits it to his son only after ritual purification. When his eldest son comes of age, the priest transmits it to him. The same system of transmission also takes place in respect of those other *Bakhen*-s, the singing of which is the prerogative not of the village priest but of the head of the household.

While *Magh Bonga* and *Baha Bonga* incantations are for the entire village, the incantations in respect of birth, marriage and death have family, clan and individual associations. It is thus the head of the house who normally knows these songs. The offering is generally made to the dead ancestors and the family gods who are remembered on such occasions. It is also to Maranburu, as is the case in the invocation songs Nos. 11 to 15. The invocation song No. 16 is, however, exclusively for the dead ancestors. These



invocations are generally recited in the house. In each Santal house there is an area demarcated as the *Bhitara ghara* or the inner room comparable to the sanctum sanctorum of a Hindu temple. This is actually the area which is used as the kitchen and where all the cooking is done. But here reside the *bonga*-s of the sub-clan to which the householder belongs. The head of the house knows the invocations meant for the Maranburu and the dead ancestors. He has also a "catch" line or a "core" line which is the essence of each invocation and with which each such invocation starts. He transmits it to his son before his death and whispers the code or words beginning the invocation in his son's ear. The special *bonga*-s who are the objects of this worship are related to each sect or a sub-clan. The Santals have 15 such sub-clans. The names of these special *bonga*-s are known only to the head of the household. Normally the father, be he the *naike* or village priest or the head of a household, would transmit this to his son only after ritual purification and standing waist-deep in a river. If a Santal dies without transmitting them to his son, the latter is supposed to take another member of his sect or sub-clan into confidence, go through the same process of ritual purification and acquire this expertise. The process is the same as for the village priest and the transmission of the relevant code by the priest to his son. The village priest or the householder is held to be competent to take the names of the *bonga*-s and solemnise the incantations only when he has learnt the codes in the process indicated above. The admission to the sect is thus in terms of the association with the bonga-s. So from birth to death a Santal thus lives and moves in the ritual world





governed by festivals and ceremonies. Apart from the two types of invocations which have been referred to above, namely those which are held in the village *Jehera* and those held in the *Bhitara ghara*, there are also some other locations for the ritual chanting of the songs specific to the occasion. For example, the cattle-shed worship is always performed in the cattle-shed. The ceremonies relating to de-weeding and harvesting are done in the fields on the outskirts of the village.

As referred to earlier, in most primitive cultures ritual invocations are an integral part of the social order and they symbolise a process of socialisation and the concern of each individual for the community. Most details of life are governed by rituals. The ritual invocations relating to marriage, birth and death are really songs celebrating the rites of passage as each of these marks a transition in the cycle of life. Among the Kondhs,

for example, whether it is the planting of a banana tree in the field or going out on a hunting expedition or in search of a bride, the village priest or *Disari* has to count the stars in the sky at night and give a suitable direction. Life is governed by immutable and unknown laws and their reflection on auspicious and inauspicious occasions has ritualistic significance. One can compare the *Meria shloka* of the Kondhs with the *Bakhen*-s of the Santals. The British rulers completely mistook the purpose of the performance of the Meria sacrifice and assumed that the Kondhs were a barbaric people given to murder, universal drinking and orgies. This was a completely mistaken view. The *Meria shloka*, the invocation that used to accompany the Kondh rite of human sacrifice, should be looked upon as a beautiful combination of the psychic element of fear, the surrender to





the deity and a concern for the welfare of the community. Take the following words which occur in the *Meria shloka*:

Let onions grow well.
Garlics grow well.
We commit no sin.
We have no guilt.
We only feed the gods.
To you, our god.
This offering.
Let no creepers enmesh the head
Nor thorns prick.

Or these lines:

Here we sacrifice the enemy.
Here we sacrifice the meria.
The gods eat up this sacrifice.
The enemy is thus worshipped.
Let there be no collective loss.
Let no tigers prowl
The gods need so many bribes,
So many offerings.
Let there be no dark forests,
No calamity.
Let all be happy.
Live in peace.

A reference has been made earlier to the peace invocation in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Discerning readers will easily note the psychological parallelism between that and the Kondh Meria shloka



narrated above or the four Santal invocations which have been given in Part Two of this article. Some of the descriptive details are also remarkably similar. As in the Vedic incantations, so also in the Meria shloka and the Santali invocations, we find the prayer of an agricultural society for, bumper harvests, plenty of cattle and a favourable monsoon. Nature is treated as the giver of bounty and the gods in nature are to be propitiated for the purpose. The concern is, therefore, for the community and its welfare. The gods are propitiated to ward off calamities and to keep away evil spirits and *bonga*-s. They are also invoked to shower their blessings by way of peace and harmony for the community.

The chanting (as mentioned earlier) is mostly done at two places — the sacred grove, which is the communal place of worship in the village, or the 'inner house' in each household. The performer is either the village priest, who represents the village interests in these sacerdotal matters, or the head of the household. The chanting is in a slow but intimate tone. Normally it is not a chorus. The priest or the head of the household recites it in a dignified voice and sometimes in bass with proper emphasis on ascent and descent in the chanting. This *arohana* and *awarohana* is very important in all traditional incantations.

II

In this section, we present two Santali invocations, namely (1) Magh Bonga (2) Baha Bonga The text of each song is first given in the original Santali in Oriya script, followed by the transliteration in Roman script with diacritical marks. At the end, the meaning of the song is suggested in an English rendering.





Magh Bonga

Salutation to you. Mother Jaher Era.
On this occasion of the Magh festival
We offer to you freshly husked rice and young fowls.
Accept, O Mother, with love and pleasure.
Our prayer to you is: make the newborn year auspicious.
Let this earth of ours be full of flowers and fruits.
When we go into the hills and the jungles to gather flowers and fruits, the food and the firewood we need.
Protect us from the thorns of wild bushes, from snakes and the depredations of tigers.
Protect us from bears and other wild animals.
Do not allow disease and pestilence to strike our village.
Keep a sharp eye on our enemies.
See that they do not enter our homes.
Let our living and movements flow smoothly and without hindrance.
Bring us the heavy clouds for good and timely rains.

And Mother,
In the movements of our living, let new life swell up.

[illegible]

[illegible]

BÀIGĀ BAṄGĀ

[illegible]

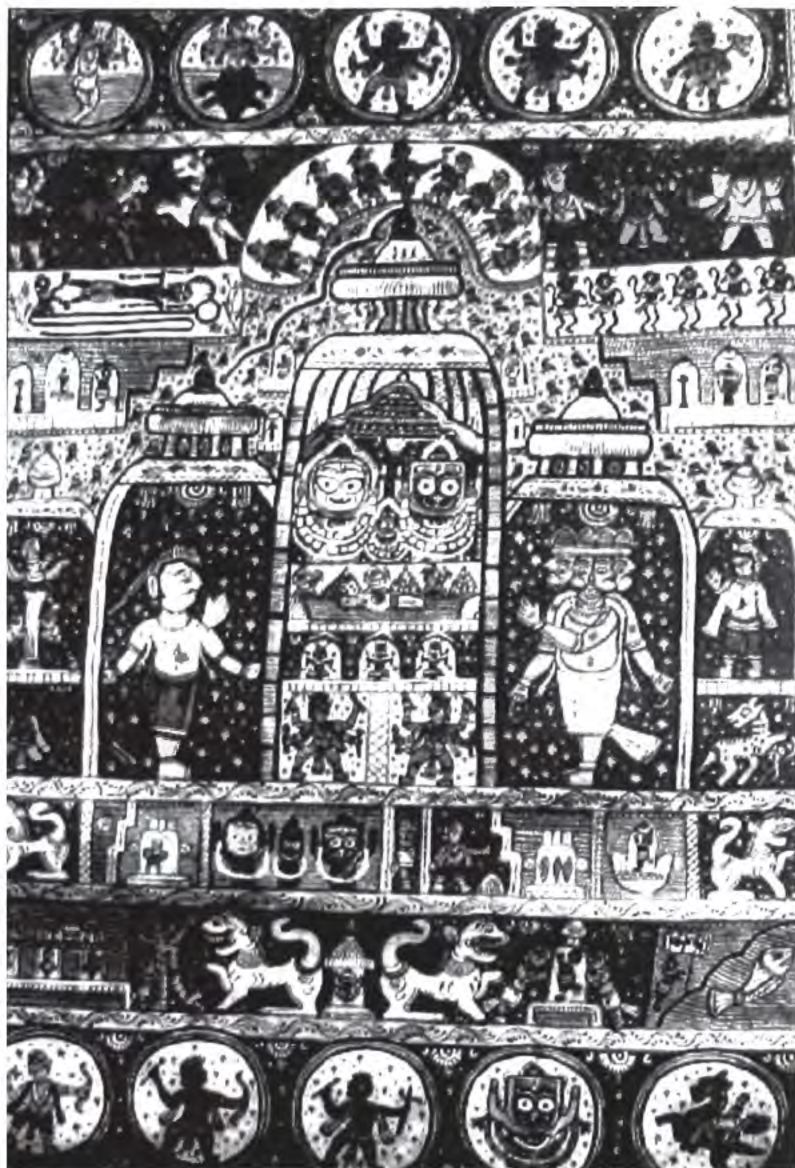


Sculpture of Mukteswar Temple

Temple Murals and Patta Painting

There are two special features of Orissan Art which deserve mention. Firstly there is a remarkable continuity in the classical folk and tribal art-forms. Right from the cave paintings through the medieval religious and ritual-oriented or classical paintings to festival-based folk paintings and tribal paintings there is a continuity which even the modern Orissan painters use in their art idiom. Secondly, Orissan Art has always treated all art-expressions as a commonality and never made water-tight compartments for them. As a result of this what is illustrated on palm leaves or pattas or on mud-walls or temple walls as murals are also the themes written about in literature, sung or danced and sculpted on stones. The parallelism which is noticeable in palm-leaf or Patta paintings and the temple sculptures, clas-





Jatri Pata

sical literature and song traditions is indeed remarkable. The most ancient example of Orissan painting is seen in Sitabinj of Keonjhar district on a huge stone formation called Ravana Chhata. Here a stone rests almost as a roof on another vertically erect stone. It is a painting of a high order depicting a royal procession with elephants and horses. The features of the characters resemble Ajanta paintings, particularly as regards their thick lips. There is a general belief that the Khandagiri caves in the outskirts of Bhubaneswar which depict the events of emperor Kharavela's reign also had mural paintings, but they have weathered away in time and are no longer visible.

The traditional mural paintings were primarily in temples and monasteries, royal palaces and the large houses of the nobles. Nothing much of the last item, however, are now available. In medieval times the art of painting was extremely popular both in royal courts and also in the folk tradition and religious tradition to convey the ideas of gods, their lives or the history of kings etc. In fact, a manuscript of 13th century mentions the various schools and traditions of paintings and names them as fourteen. Every prince considered it a matter of prestige to have a chitrakar or chitralekh who could draw and paint. The tradition of Odissi painting had broadly three streams - the Puri school centred round the Jagannath temple; the southern Ganjam tradition with the celebrated art works at Buguda, Khallikote, Dharakote, Khemundi, Ghumsar,Parala, Tikali, Manjusha etc. The third style was the Champamal school, primarily in and around Sonepur and Sambalpur. The first two schools resembled each other aesthetically and even thematically. The functional inspiration was religious with royalty as the sponsoring agency. In fact, kings and

temples were inseperable in contemporaneous society and paintings adored temple walls as much as royal palaces. The Champamal school was somewhat different aesthetically and art historians speak of its resemblance to Indonesian art. One does not, however, know the precise channel through which Orissa had travelled to Indonesia (notably Java) in those times.

Jagannath temple was the main source of classical painting. The *dasavatar* or ten incarnations of Vishnu were on the pillars, walls and ceilings of Jagmohan along with Krishna Leela and the creation of the universe. In fact, the inspiration for the patta paintings seems to have originated in the temple. During the period when Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are not available for public viewing prior to the Rath Jatra a large-sized painting of the Trimurty was put up on the temple wall as a substitute. Later such paintings were done for adorning the royal residences for purpose of worship. Besides the main temple, the walls and ceilings of the subsidiary temples of Laxmi, Vimala and others were also covered with mural paintings depicting



Pata painting



A scene from Ramayan

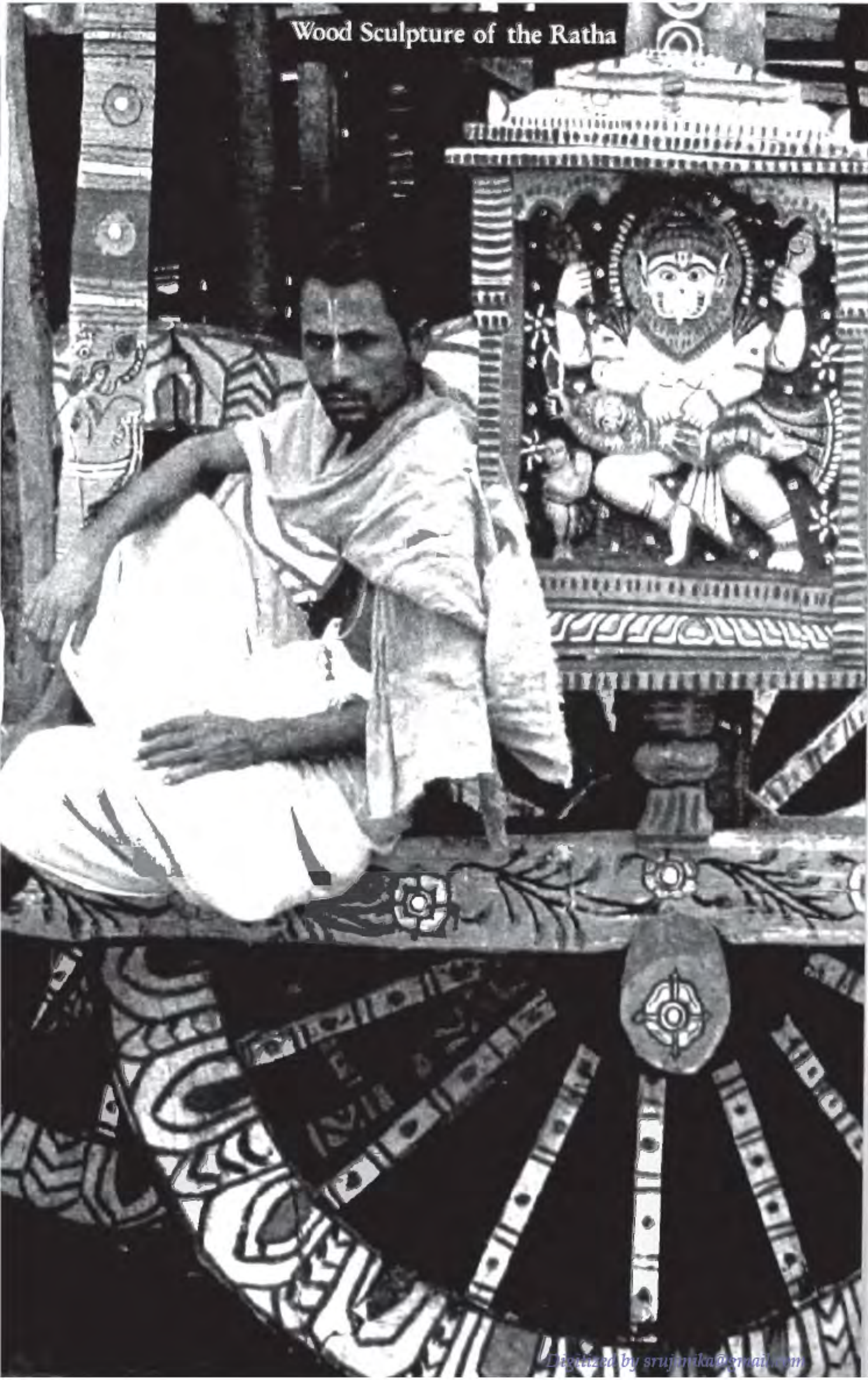
Wall painting from Biranchi Narain Temple in Buguda

various themes from Puranas including Ramayana, Mahabharat and Bhagavata. *Nava Gunjara* which is a strange animal with different parts of its body resembling parts of different animals was a pet theme from classical times.

The Ganjam school's most celebrated paintings are in the Biranchi Narayan temple of Buguda and the temple of Dharakote palace. These two have been extensively documented. The Dharakote paintings have as their theme both Rama and Krishna Leela. They are rather in miniature form and the figures are rarely more than six inches in height. The colours used are extremely pleasing in their harmony. The Buguda paintings are larger and more in the line of normal mural paintings.

Mural paintings apart, Orissa has the miniature paintings generally called Patta paintings which are meant to be hung on the walls. The patta painting tradition perhaps emerged from the Jagannath temple and the village Raghurajpur, not far from Puri, is the hub of patta painting tradition. The art of patta painting is well documented and researched and there are significant publications which go into the technique, the methodology, the colour schemes, the thematic diversity of this type of painting. Patta painting is traditionally on canvas which is completely smoothened by rubbing specially prepared material on it and then suitably seasoned. But silk canvas is also now frequently used. In fact, patta painting can also be directly painted on walls when the entire wall face is treated in a manner similar to a small canvas. Patta paintings are now enormously popular and hotels, offices and houses of the affluent always consider it a matter of prestige to have a good piece of patta. The result is increasing




Wood Sculpture of the Ratha

commercialisation and occasional dilution of quality and even deviation from the core of the aesthetic background and primary colours used by the masters of traditional patta-painting.

Orissa has the largest collection of palm-leaf manuscripts or pothis many of which were illustrated in colour. Generally they deal with puranic themes either only as written composition or accompanied by etchings which could be black and white or painted in colour. Pothi writing and painting is a special art of Orissa. Seasoned palm leaf was the surface on which an iron stylus was used to write or to etch. In fact, the character of Oriya alphabet being rounded can be traced to this. Obviously one cannot have sharp turns on palm leaf as it would run the risk of getting torn. Hence the letters as also the figures tend to be without many sharp edges and are rounded to the extent possible.

A lot of medieval literature is available in pothis with black and white etchings and colour paintings. Orissa State Museum has the largest collection of Pothis in the whole of India - the more celebrated are the various versions of Jayadev's *Gita Govinda*, Sisu Shankar's *Ushavilas*, *Amarusatakam*, *Lavanyavati*, *Vaidehisha Vilasa* etc. The themes are suitably illustrated first by plain etchings and then, when the artist wanted it, by application of appropriate paint. This author has translated and edited two of these, namely, *Ushavilasa* and *Amarusatakam*, the latter being the well-known hundred verses of Amaru which are written in Oriya script and Sanskrit language and then


Chitrakara of Patta at work

illustrated. Generally, the script writers were also the illustrators. There was perhaps a professional class of such painters or illustrators known as chitrakaras. One of them is the celebrated Raghunath Prusti of Dharakote whose work is of high order. Many scribes often wrote out the celebrated works of important authors and their role was mostly limited to scribing or illustrating and not the creative writing. The pothis of very early periods seem to have been lost. What is available now are the works from 17th century onwards.

Orissa's tribals have created a high level of visual art. Orissa has 65 tribal communities and is virtually an open-air ethnic museum. Their paintings can be broadly divided into two groups. The wall-paintings of the Saoras, more popularly referred to as icons or pictograms, have a ritual base. The wall paintings of the Juangs, the Bhuyans, the Dongria Kondhs, the Santals and the Godabas are decorative in nature and emerge from an impulse to adorn. They have creepers, trees, birds and animals as their primary motifs. The Santals also use beautiful geometric patterns. The colours used are white, red, ochre (local soils have these colours) and black (made out of burnt straw).

The Santal houses are truly beautiful and picturesque with entire walls sometimes painted over. The Saora icons are primarily 9 types meant for different ritual-religious functions to propitiate the gods and ancestors. The Saora pictograms can therefore be looked upon as art as ritual. An icon or painting on the wall is a ritualistic temple where, through a

Masks, Raghurajpur





The bent head by Jatin Das



Lady by Dinanath Pathy

"sacred" performance and chant, the Saora family-head or priest installs/imprisons various gods and goddesses in the act of propitiation. The chant often have the following lines : "I have made a house for you. Here are your elephants, horses. Come riding on them. Here are your suns and moons, crops and trees, gods of the sky, come and see the house. Deities of the hills! come and see the house".

Saora icon-making is thus a religious-ritual act. The mud walls are washed smooth and the colour is generally ground rice-paste, applied with a twig as the brush. Nowadays additional colours are also occasionally used.

Orissa has a rich repertoire of folk paintings. On different social religious occasions such as Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja, Khudurukuni Puja, marriage ceremonies etc. the walls are painted with various designs and themes. These are, however, mostly decorative with floral designs, peacocks and other birds, elephants and animals etc. The colours used are generally white (rice paste) and ochre. *Chita*, as it is called, has a fabulous variety and deserve to be fully documented and described. Different colours in shape of powder are also used in drawing pictures on the ground primarily in the month of Kartik. This is called *Muruja*. In fact both *chita* and *muruja* are now being used in non-religious secular occasions like meetings, conferences etc. as decorative devices. Mention may also be made of *ganjapas*, the painted circular cards made in Ganjam and immensely popular with the cognoscenti. There was a time when on festive social occasions earthen pots used to be painted with various designs even to serve as containers for sweets sent to relatives on special occasions. The womenfolk in the villages used to do it. The tradition continues but definitely it is in decline.



Fish Cutter by L. N. Sahu

Thus the folk and tribal paintings of Orissa present a wide variety and a rich and complex heritage. So do the traditional paintings of the classical-puranic periods found in temples and palaces. All of them have influenced, in various degrees, Orissa's modern painters from Bimbadhar Burma to Jatin Das, from Muralidhar Tali to Asit Mukherjee and Dinanath Pathy.

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Saora Icons as Pictograms

Magic and ritual occupy an important place in the socio-religious life of all primitive communities. There are numerous occasions when an individual, a family or even the entire community is faced by a calamity or a tragedy. It could be a disease in epidemic form; it could be repeated snatching away of men by man-eating tigers or the depredation of other wild animals; it could be a devastating flood or earthquake. Quite often the primitive mind is unable to discern the proximate or remote cause of such tragedies by reasoning and logic. The causes are, therefore, attributed to the wrath of malevolent gods or spirits who are supposed to be annoyed or angered for one reason or another. Fear becomes the driving force and an attempt is then made to appease the malevolent god or spirit by a suitable offering. Quite often such propitiation of gods and spirits may not be for the negative purpose of warding off disease or disasters but to positively invoke their blessings for peace and prosperity, for abundant crops, healthy cattle and numerous happy children.

The Saora tribe is divided into several sub-groups which have almost become endogamous. Among these subdivisions of the Saoras, the Lanjia Saoras who inhabit the agency tracts of Gumma and Pottasingi areas are the most primitive and economically the most underdeveloped. Relatively little affected by the external change agents, they have been able to preserve some of their arts and crafts, house-types and methods of cultivation.

Saora icon making is related primarily to matters of health and disease, epidemics, death and child birth. There are two



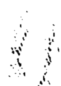
distinct stages in this plastic art. In the first stage the ritual divination by the priest leads to the identification of the 'spirit' or the 'power' that has caused a disease or death and that needs to be propitiated. It is at this stage that the words of the spell are used. Secondly, instead of an attempt to ward off the evil or malevolent spirit here the spirit is brought in or rather pulled or dragged in and installed/imprisoned in a ritualistic, one-dimensional temple in the icon.

The spell also has two sequences. In the first part, there is a general invocation to all gods and spirits that are supposed to inhabit the Saora world. In the second part, the particular spirit is invoked to come and occupy the house that has been specially built for it.

The incantation which is uttered at the time of worship is given below :

Oh gods and goddesses, you are all in our village. We have been worshipping you from time beyond memory. We have learnt from our forefathers all the methods of worship. We do not eat any crop or any fruit unless these are offered to you first. After you have taken these fruits then we eat; otherwise not, because we know that we will face many difficulties and we will suffer from many diseases if we eat the new crops and new fruits before offering these to you.

We are always moving about in the forests. The whole world is full of demons, ghosts, and evil spirits and there are tigers and bears and many other wild animals in the forests. These supernatural beings and wild animals create trouble for us and we fall easy prey to them when we violate our traditional customs and practices. We always pray to you to come to our rescue at the time of distress and calamities. If you do not pay any heed





to our prayers, we cannot live in this world. We will fall ill and die.

After the incantation has been recited and the icon is more or less complete, the artist goes on to give finishing touches to it. Now he makes a salutation to the god or spirit by touching the ground by his head and then recites the following:

I have made a house for you. Here are your elephants, horses. Come riding on them. Here are your suns and moons, crops and trees. Come and see what a nice house I have built for you with my own hands. Gods of the sky, come and see the house. Deities of the hills, come and see the house.

In the icon making is thus fused the binary opposing characteristics of (a) power of the magician and (b) his petitionary posture; (a) success in identifying the spirit, victory in pulling the spirit into the net of the circumscribed ritual space and hold him there and (b) worship him with offerings both proximate and remote, i.e. the immediately offered food and drink and the stocking of food, water, umbrella etc. for the spirit's future use next to the ritualised space of the temple; (a) the pragmatic practical purpose of healing, curing diseases, initiating safe child-birth, assuring plenty of crops and rains and (b) the somewhat surrealistic nature of the painting; (a) the fecundity ceremony performed by (b) too austere, too puristic a ritual.

Often there is a prescribed season for drawing these icons. The icons are drawn generally in the month of Falgun during Dolapurnima or in the month of Aswin during Dashera. The time also varies from place to place. For instance, the Saoras of Gumma area of Gajapati District draw the icons in the month of Margasir during any new food-eating ceremony.

The icons are generally drawn by the *kudan*, i.e. the priest



or the sorcerer of the village. If any male member knows the techniques of drawing he is also free to draw the icons. Although there is no such taboo, the women are not allowed to draw the icons. The first preference is however the *kudan*. He is the person who has the traditional hereditary right to know the art of detecting the spirit and prescribing the rituals leading ultimately to the painting of the icons on the mud walls. He has the social and magical power for this purpose. Besides that, there is also the economic basis. The *kudan* has a right to appropriate the objects that are offered to the spirit at the time of the propitiation ceremony. It means the rice, the handia or rice-beer, the fowl and sometimes also a share in the goat sacrificed on the occasion.

The icon is always drawn in the morning. After finishing bath the *kudan* comes to the house where the icon is to be drawn. The housewife prepares some powder out of white rice, adds water to it and makes a white paste. After it is done, she gives this white paint over to the *kudan* to start drawing the icon. The woman prepares this paint after her bath with empty stomach.

The day before the icon is drawn, a portion of the wall is given a clean wash in a solution of locally available red earth and water mixed together. The icon drawn on the wall is kept as such until it is repeated next year. The drawing of icons is an expensive proposition and it requires many ritual objects such as chicken, fruits and other materials needed during worship. Some families are not in a position to meet this expense every year and, therefore, they skip over some years and take it up only when they can afford to collect the materials except when there is a pressing need for drawing the icon due to a sudden attack of disease, epidemic or need for a safe delivery of a child.

There are several motives behind drawing the icons.

Whenever any person falls ill, he meets the *kudan* of the village and informs him about the illness and seeks his help in detecting the evil spirit which has caused the illness and remedial measures for its recovery. Among the Saoras, one of the important measures is to draw an icon on the wall and dedicate it to the evil spirit concerned along with the offering of either a goat or a fowl as well as incense, fruits and flowers.

In Saora society it is incumbent on the part of the *kudan* to have a detailed knowledge about the supernatural beings, their characteristics, physical features and the nature of troubles they create for the people and the types of food they like to eat. The *kudan* also learns the techniques of drawing icons depicting human and supernatural figures, means of transport, floral and faunal figures, etc. In order to develop the skill of drawing icons he draws figures of different kinds and thereby sets his hand by practising several times. The drawings done by him as a beginner are of hypothetical kind and these drawings depict various phases of the occultism starting from the point of receiving the news of illness through sending assistants to catch hold of the concerned evil spirits and bringing them down to the *kudan* by the quickest means of transport to the final phase of installing the spirit in the unidimensional shrine







represented by the icon depicting all kinds of conceivable animals and men including musicians, bodyguards, flowering plants and fruit trees, etc.

The Saora pictograms are a curious amalgam of the traditional and the new. It is the product of an agricultural community, their emphasis on the sun, the acts of ploughing, broadcasting seeds, trees etc. And yet one also notices bicycles, automobiles, chairs and tables, confabulations and constructions - all the influence of the outside world impinging on their lives. The elders of the Saora village assemble in a central place and fix a day on which the icon would be drawn. Often the religious head of the village has the final say in this matter. The materials which are required for this purpose are purchased on a market day prior to the day appointed for drawing the icon. The requirements of ritual objects for drawing the icon sometimes vary from one area to another. But broadly they conform to a pattern. It includes clothes, banana, coconut, incense, ghee for the lamps, candles, sweets, goat, cock, and locally made rice-beer. Fruits and flowers are also collected and kept ready for the worship.

Folk Art of Orissa: Continuity in the Visual Tradition

In recent years there has been a growing interest in folk art-forms all over the world. In a sense this can be looked upon as an attempt to return to the roots, to discover the true source and significance of art in the universal modes of aesthetic perception intimately linked with the business of living. In the past few centuries art has taken on far too much intellectual, formal load and to that extent, even as it has become more and more sophisticated and refined, it has come to be seen as the creation of a small elite, sometimes meant for the consumption or enjoyment of an equally small clientele. In fact, sometimes the group is so small that some have called it a priesthood. Folk art, on the other hand, drew its sustenance from the life of the folk; it partook of the energy, the elan, the vivacity and the jest for living that characterise the life of the folk. Art creation had no set theory to guide it; no formal, intellectual hypothesis that governed it. It was open-ended, tentative, informal, communitarian. Art creation was often a group activity. Often too it was a celebration of life, of joys and sorrows. It was never divorced from life, never far from it. At its centre was a concern for the group; intimate linkage with the gods, the ancestors and above all nature. In fact, they all were part of the environment man lived in.

Luckily in Orissa, life has never strayed too far from the ancient folkways of living. This is partly due to history; Orissa was one of the last regions of the country to go under the British rule and the modernising influence of British rule had a

Jhoti Chita



Farua Mondal
Drawn on the 9th day of worship of Goddess Durga

comparatively late start. The folk forms of art remained undistorted, unalloyed for long and it is only in the last few decades, with the pace of growth and industrialisation picking up, that there have been significant impact of modernising influences on these forms.

Further, in Orissa's folk art, one can discern a total lack of attempt to differentiate the secular and the religious, the sacred and the profane. The occasion may be religious, but the motif adopted or symbolism used either in a performing art number or a piece of plastic art could be totally secular. In fact, this is a quality Orissa's folk-art shares with almost all forms of artistic activity in the State - whether folk, classical or tribal, which has made scholars recognise a tremendous unbroken folk-tribal-classical continuum over the centuries.

Art has been almost a part of the daily ritual of living. In the very art of working out the daily chores of life; and with the change of the seasons there is always a manifestation of artistic impulse. This extends all the way from plastic arts like wall decorations, *chittas* or *murujas* to painting earthen-pots, the stylised ways of making betel-nuts, different kinds of edibles and varieties of stylised artifacts both useful and aesthetically charming.

Poverty or under-development never had any linkage with these art-creations. The community produced its art, enjoyed and consumed it. There were no professional artists or performers nor any leisured-class consumers with the intervening group of economic gate-keepers.

It is perhaps necessary to emphasize the point that Orissa had its golden age of empire inside the country and flourishing maritime activity in South-East Asia at least between the reign



Kadha Padma

Drawn with *muruja* during the *Raja* Festival

of the Kesharis in 8th century A.D. and the Surya dynasty in 15th century. This was the age of plenty and prosperity, of peace and expanding horizons and it is possible to think the major forms of Orissan folk-art as we know today came to be developed during these halcyon days. For an agricultural people, the season of harvest, of bringing home the grains from the field is a time for great joy and celebration. The month of Margasira which is early winter is the time for harvesting highland paddy. And paddy is the staple crop in Orissa. Laxmi is the goddess of wealth. She is the consort of Jagannath and her powers and grace have been described in great detail through narration of episodes in that popular *purana,* the *Laxmi Purana.* On every Thursday in the month of Margasira, Laxmi is worshipped in every rural household. A small measure made of cane or bamboo is traditionally put on a wooden pedestal, filled in with the freshly-garnered paddy and decorated with colourful cloth. The place of worship is normally the innermost corner of one of the living rooms. And elegant-looking footprints of Laxmi are painted right from the outside entrance of the house to simulate the image that she has condescended to walk into the house and thus blessed it. The painting is done with rice-paste and water. The patterns of the moving feet vary depending on the artist's vision and normally they are small, delicate feet symbolising grace and beauty. On this occasion the mud walls of the houses are also painted with various floral designs and pictures of birds (particularly peacocks) and creepers of various descriptions. In the night before Thursday, the women-folk in every house prepare the rice-paste and do these murals on the walls and the floors before retiring to bed. Laxmi is the goddess of wealth in general, even though, more specifically, she is regarded as the goddess

of grains, of paddy. Now-a-days, her footprints are also laid up to almirahs inside the houses, symbolising her entry into these containers, which should be full of money. The wall decorations are often exquisite and delineate great capacity of the rural women to innovate and change within the broad frame-work of certain conventions and traditions. These in turn they imbibe from their mothers, grand-mothers or may be wives of brothers before their marriage. There is, thus, an informal professionalism which is traditionally passed from one generation to another. It is so in many other forms of folk art in Orissa.

Besides the *Chita* or *Jhoti* which is painted on floors and walls for Laxmi Puja, there are various other occasions for similar paintings in Orissa's rural areas round the year. These are the various recurring seasonal festivals such as Khudurukuni, Dushera, Kartika, Buddhi Bamana, Dakshina Samkranti, Prathamashtami etc. Besides these, for marriage and sacred-thread ceremony or Upanayana, *Chitas* are also painted on the walls of houses. In the former normally there are pictures of palanquins and their bearers for the bride and the bridegroom, different categories of ornaments in addition to water-filled pitchers or *Kalasa*, floral designs and decorations and banana trees which symbolise auspiciousness.

In Orissa there is a saying that there are twelve religious occasions or *Bratas* and thirteen festivals or *Parvas* round the year. For each of these occasions, the walls, the doors, the floors are washed and variously painted.

There is growing evidence of the ancientness of this heritage of folk painting on walls and floors. The illustrated palmleaf manuscripts found in abundance in Orissa are the earliest indications of the art. Writing on palm-leaves, etching and illustrat

ing on palm-leaf with iron stylus was indeed an art. Often these etchings were also painted in colours. These included birds, animals, floral designs, gods and goddesses, lovers and beloved, houses, creepers etc. Besides this the *Pattachitra* painters of coastal Orissa and the *Ganjapa* painters of Southern Orissa are also part of this great heritage of folk-painting.

In ancient Orissa there used to be Chitrakara Sahis or Painters Colony in Puri town and in quite a number of neighbouring villages. Even today there is the Chitrakara Sahi in Puri town, in village Raghurajpur, Itamati, Nayagarh and also in village Narasinghpur and Kishore Nagar in Cuttack district. These are indeed artist villages in the true sense of the term and these artists have kept up the tradition of *Pattachitras* which perhaps emerged in the Puri temple in the early period of the Ganga dynasty. The *Pattachitra* artists have taken on themes from our puranas and mainly the themes of Krishna and his exploits (stealing of the clothes of the Gopis, dancing on the head of the serpent Kaliya, etc.), Jagannath and Balabhadra going to Kanchi on the side of the King of Puri and on the way giving away their rings as payment for curd to the milkmaid; *Dasavatara* (the ten incarnations of Vishnu) and so on. The art of *Pattachitra* is a very elaborate and complex art. It involves the careful preparation of the canvas which is made absolutely smooth before it is painted over. The *Pattachitra* of Orissa is indeed as well known as the Madhubani paintings and their skill of execution, the graceful blending of colours, the firmness and suppleness of the lines, the strength of the compositions - all these make them superb as folk paintings. Today there is great demand for them in Star hotels and fashionable bungalows all over the country.

The *Jhoti* or *Chita* and the *muruja* are, however, less

sophisticated forms of paintings and reveal more of the folk spirit. While the former is made with rice paste, the latter uses a variety of materials in powder form as the ingredients. Normally, they use five colours. The white is made out of powdered rice or white chalk-stone. Black colour is obtained from the burnt and powdered coconut shells; yellow from turmeric powdered with *arua* rice; green from dried and powdered leaves of selected trees and varieties of red are obtained from powdered brick, or *phagu*. *Muruja* is generally painted out on the ground as per designs and using the various colours. The last days of the month of Kartika are considered auspicious and every morning the girls and women folk of each home draw the *muruja* pictures near the *Tulsi Chaura* and at the entrance to the house. Besides this specific occasion, muruja paintings are also used in the worship of specific gods or planets. The blending of colours and the deftness with which these are sprinkled on the ground with the help of only two fingers of the right hand are really enviable.

As regards the *Jhoti Chita* the ingredient is mostly rice paste in water with requisite dilution. Here also the fingers are the brush. The walls which are washed with earth and cow-dung and are dried quickly, absorb the moisture from the diluted paste leaving the designs intact. The most important designs are the paddy stalks. Sometimes a small piece of cloth or beaten-up sticks is used as the brush along with the work of the fingers. As in *muruja* here also white chalk stone, yellow earth, black colour from burnt coconut shell and *dhau* (a kind of reddish stone which is rubbed on to produce the colour) are also used for decorating the major designs. During Dusehera the designs are more elaborate. There is greater emphasis on red and black,

symbolising the killing of Mahisasura by Durga unlike in the festival of the goddess of wealth where the overwhelming emphasis is on pure white. The war of Rama and Ravana, pairs of fish, *Navagunjar* (that peculiar animal sharing features of nine different animals) peacocks, different kinds of intricate bandhas or integrated, intermixed features, banana trees and filled up earthen pitchers - these are some of the motifs that occur in *jhoti chita*. It is not possible to achieve very great sophistication or finesse in such paintings using almost bare fingers and on surfaces like the walls or floors. And yet, in huge panels and murals they really look exquisite and fresh. They are innovative even while retaining the basic tradition. Broadly, the motifs fall into three categories - the geometric designs (lines, circles, triangles, rectangles etc.); the delineation of nature and natural objects; and the ornamental designs.

The painting of the earthen pots that carried varieties of sweetmeats to the house of the daughter given away in marriage also to be used a very interesting form of folk-art. This is an art form that is dying out as a result of social changes and modernisation. For each Purnima and ritual festival it was customary to send *bhars* with earthen-pots full of sweets hung on either side of a pole carried on the shoulders. The affluence of a family was judged by the number of *bhars* which was sent to the daughter's house on a particular occasion. These sweetmeats were normally distributed among the relations in the village and the womenfolk always reviewed and commented on the quality of the paintings on the earthen pots. Here also the designs were numerous and colourfully decorated



and when placed together, twenty or thirty in a row, they made a real impact on the mind. The designs were mostly floral, geometric and pictures of birds and creepers. Nowadays, instead of all these, parents perhaps prefer to send a gift-cheque on a festive occasion.

The impulse to adorn is one of the most ancient impulses of man. This is particularly so for women. It is not merely the artificial aids to beauty like cosmetics. The painted marks on the body at carefully chosen places are supposed to heighten beauty. Ancient Oriya women used a large repertoire of cosmetics and analogous preparations. Sandal wood paste, collyrium, turmeric kumkum, vermillion aguru, kasturi, chua, ketaki paraga were some of it. The ancient literary texts have ample references to these decorative practices. *Manjuati* leaves and the flowers of *bargoura* are even today applied to the fingers, palm and the feet for decorative designs and motifs.

Tattooing or etching tattoo marks on the body of women was also an ancient folk form of art. Whether these permanent marks on the female anatomy - on face, neck, arms, palms, feet, thighs, etc. - were part of the normal impulse to adorn and beautify or whether these were attempts to make the women less beautiful and thereby not attract the lustful eyes of Mughal and Pathan rulers one can never be sure. But it appears reasonable to assume that it was more ancient than the coming of the Mughals to India. Tattooing was performed by



a professional class of nomadic women called *Kelunis* who moved along with their husbands, the *Kelas* from village to village with their *dhudki* music and occasional music performance. Tattooing is done with sharp-pointed needles and is quite painful and yet it is tolerated by the concerned womenfolk. The motifs are generally Radhakrishna, Jagannath-Balabhadra-Subhadra, flowers, deer, *navagunjara*, butterfly, earthen jars conch, different flowers and creepers etc.

As elements of women's decorations there were wooden combs of various designs, shapes and sizes, combs made of horn and bamboo, *patafuli, chauri* etc. which have slowly yielded place to plastic combs and silver filigree ornaments.

Among other products of folk-art mention must also be made of the different patterns of needle work and patch work like embroidery and applique works that produce articles of everyday use with lot of artistic creativity built into them. There is the all-purpose purse, locally known as *Batua* wherein one can keep the various ingredients of pan, money, cosmetics, papers and almost everything. And this was very much a 'unisex' product and both men and women used it. There were other types of containers called *ganjia* and these used to be a netted structure using different types of coloured threads. Pipili, a place not far from Bhubaneswar, is deservedly popular for its wide variety of applique works - from wall-decorations to purses and bags, seat covers and letter-bags etc. -- which are highly artistic



and have a reputation all over the country. Heart-shaped *alata*-s and *chamara*-s decorated garden umbrellas also reflect a high degree of sophistication and are exported to foreign countries in large measure. The *Batua*-s are sometime additionally fitted up with cowries, corals, brass or silver plates and tops for added elegance and beauty. The locally made mattresses called *kantha* also has on it various designs of flowers, birds and animals. The poor people used torn clothes and garments as stuffings in these *kantha*-s. Special canopies of Pipli are also popular throughout Orissa because of the preponderance of geometric and floral motifs on them.

In all these embroidery applique works and wall-paintings and murals one can notice the grace and lyricism of village life, the motifs and symbolism taking shape from an intimate realisation of the rhythm of unsophisticated but artistic village traditions and an enviable intimacy with nature and the cycle of seasons.

For centuries, cooking and eating have been treated as artistic activities in Orissa's villages. The dishes must not only be palatable to the tongue; they must also look elegant and inviting to the eye and be aesthetically satisfying. Preparation of *pan* occupied a very special place in the training of a girl for marriage. She was expected to prepare the *pan* with the requisite ingredients added in right measure and to fold up the leaf and tuck it away with cloves into various elegant shapes. The elders in the household of the father-in-law were expected to pronounce their judgment on the ability and skill of the new bride in preparing pan. The preparation of varieties of *badi,* an eatable made out of blackgram with various other ingredients mixed with it was also a great art. *Badi* can be made with sugarcane, sago, mung, til and a host of other products. To each category garlic, ginger, pepper, cumin seeds

etc are added on to make it more palatable. The shape of *badi* can vary widely from the normally small round ones to shapes of fish, tortoise, frogs, flowers and creepers, lotus etc. The preparation of *badi* is itself an art and they mix various ingredients including seeds of pumpkins and the slight admixture of various colours. The same things apply to the varieties of baked cakes or *pithas* prepared by the ladies for various festivals. The names of these *pithas* are indeed legion and they have different techniques of preparations. Often they have an upper crust of rice paste duly baked and inside there are various palatable mixtures. The *pithas* have wide complexity and variety of shapes and they are indeed baffling in their artistic shapes and forms.

Even though the textile art of Orissa, its tie-and-dye designs are very famous, it is not being discussed here because the ikat work of the Orissa weavers deserve a very detailed treatment. The weavers of Nuapatna in Cuttack district and Sonepur incorporate designs and motifs in textiles (cotton as well as silk), which are wellknown nationally and internationally.

There are a large variety of handicrafts of Orissa, which reflect the magnificence of Orissa's folk-art. They can be mentioned only briefly in this general survey. Take the terracotta products of Orissa. These include various types of coloured toys, cooking vessels and other articles of daily use, water-storage jugs, musical instruments, *Tulsi Chauras*, votive offerings of horses and other animals to gods and goddesses, birds, insects, etc. Then there are the images of gods and goddesses



and more particularly those of Durga, Saraswati, Ganesh and Laxmi. Cuttack is famous for these image-makers who have devoted themselves to this art for several generations.

The filigree work of Cuttack is nationally and internationally famous. This also is basically a form of folk-art. And the motifs and themes here range all the way from the *Gian* (Krishna as the charioteer of Arjuna) to Konarka wheels, cigarette pipes, ornaments for women so on.

The stone carves are another group of folk artists found largely in the villages of Puri and Cuttack district and also sporadically in other districts. They are the direct descendants of the sculptors of Konarka, Rajarani and Mukteswar temples and their work is deservedly popular all over the country even today. They carve elegance and poetry out of stubborn stone and their exquisite sculpture pieces in granite, sand-stone, chalk-stone are really superb pieces of craft. The products also include articles of daily use such as utensils, storing materials which can be beautifully sculptured and designs etched on them.



The metalware products of Orissa using brass, cooper, zinc and other alloys are also deservedly popular. Here we have a bewildering range of articles of art and daily use, of sacred and secular necessity that is indeed mind-boggling. They range all the way from massive doors of brass to lamps and tiny art-objects of various shapes and sizes. They also include different gods and goddesses. The *Dhokra* metalware which is made of an alloy and cast in

the primitive way with earth and sand is another major area of metalcraft of Orissa revealing the exquisite-ness of folk art. These products made in Dhenkanal and Keonjhar districts have religious inspirations, as the motifs are mainly local deities, goddesses riding on elephants with lamps fitted onto chariots. They also make measures (for measuring rice etc.) and various other products.

Articles made out of golden grass, cane, bamboo, leaves of palm, date-palm or coconut trees fall into yet another distinctive category of folk art. The containers of various sizes, the screens for doors and windows, the partition walls made out of golden grass are indeed superb.

The stalks of a plant called *Kaincha*, is used in the same way as golden grass for fashioning different types of containers. Leaves of palm, date palm and coconut are also used for a wide variety of products with colourful designs.

Bamboo and cane are used to turn out artefacts, which are again vast in their range and variety. Often there is use of lacquer with bamboo and cane that make the finished products even more elegant and beautiful. The cane and bamboo products are often the handiwork of the scheduled caste people.



Woodcarving is yet another major area of folk art. Here you get a product range that extends from palanquins, carved doors and windows to toys and articles of daily use. Etchings and use of colour heighten the beauty of the products.

The 'sola' products of Orissa primarily meant for decorations of gods and goddesses, the head-dress of brides and



bridegrooms in marriages, necklaces and a host of other products is also worthy of mention. This is made out of a rather light material of a plant that grows in water. A professional group who thrived on this art still exists in rural areas of Orissa.

One may also mention the leather works and horn works of Orissa. The former is still the main profession of certain scheduled caste families who make not only shoes but also bags, purses, etc. out of tanned leather. Horn work was particularly famous in Paralakhemundi area but is now facing stiff competition from plastic industries and is rather on the wane.

From all these it may be seen that Orissa's folk art has a range and magnitude which is perhaps unique in the country. This is largely due to historical circumstances, which has helped maintain a classical-folk-tribal continuum in this area.

In these folk forms of art, there is no distinction between art as leisured activity with a leisured class as its consumer. Art is created as people go about their daily business of living, individually and collectively. As in the field of performing arts so also in the field of artifacts, handicrafts and plastic arts, art and utility go hand in hand. Once Marx said that the coming generation of artists would try to bridge the gap between action and dream. In folk art, almost naturally, such bridging of action and dream, utility and aesthetic consideration, is always there, spontaneously.



The folk arts of Orissa, like all folk art, originated in the life-style of the people, are nourished by the generations and carried forward over time. The rhythms of folk life pulsate in them. The entire business of living is punctuated by performances that belong to the community.

Sitakant Mahapatra is a major voice in modern Indian poetry. His anthologies have been published in all the Indian languages and in eleven non-Indian languages including Spanish, French, German, Russian, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew. He has received the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award and the Kabir Samman. He is one of the foremost interpreters of the oral poetry of Indian tribes, and UNESCO has published a volume of oral poetry, *They SingLife*, edited by him. His earlier collections of essays, *The Curve of Meaning, Gestures of Intimacy, Barefoot into Reality, The Role of Tradition in Literature and Tradition and the Modern Artist* have established him as an intellectual of rare eminence. A Padmabhusan awardee, recently Soka University conferred on him its 'Highest Honour' in a special convocation. Currently he lives with his wife at Bhubaneswar.

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